ALL-STORY

Combined with MUNSEY

Jan. 25

Love Stories of the American Girl

On Sale Every Other Wednesday

20¢ Canada 25¢

CLEAN
WHOLESOME
GRIPPING

Another
Beulah Poynter
Story
Cinderella on Broadway

Also
Mystery Girl
by
Doris Knight Jessee
A Thrilling love story of San Francisco's Chinatown

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We Want A Name

for this new wonderful SHAMPOO

This Offer Open to Every Reader of This Announcement

Have you sent a name? If not, do so at once. It makes no difference who you are or where you live, we want you to send us a name for this new and unusual shampoo. Whoever sends the most suitable name will win $1000—nothing else to do.

WIN $1000.00 CASH

Any Name May Win!

No matter how simple you think your suggestion is, you cannot afford to neglect sending it at once! Any name may win. The names of people, flowers, trees, birds, etc., may be submitted, or a coined word or a word made by combining two or more words such as "Sungleam," etc., or your name might suggest the handy new tube container. No bottle to break, leak, or spill, no cake of soap to lie around and collect germs. There is nothing more to do, simply the person sending the most suitable suggestion for a name will receive $1000.00 in cash, or if prompt, $1100.00 in all.

You May Win Thousands Like These Folks Did!

Think of the joy and happiness our check for $1000.00 would mean to you, or if prompt $1100.00 in all. Better still, by participating in our other prize offers, you may win an additional $8000.00, making a total of $9100.00 in all. The two persons whose pictures are reproduced, Mrs. John E. Isley, and Mr. A. B. Morren, tied for first prize in our last contest and received cashier's checks dated August 13, 1929.

$3425.00 Paid To Each!

Mrs. Isley is a young married woman, residing with her husband in Virginia. She has a young son and her household duties to look after, but found time to win this handsome prize. Mr. Morren is a native of Holland, and has only been in this country a few years. He is employed by an oil company in Pennsylvania. Think of the pleasure and happiness this prize money will bring to both of these people and their families.

Are you ambitious? Do you, too, want to win a handsome prize? If so, you may be even more successful than these two people have been. Remember, there is no obligation! In addition to the $1000.00 cash prize ($1100.00 in all if prompt), we are also offering one hundred other big cash prizes ranging from $25.00 to $8000.00 as a part of our novel advertising plan. Everyone sending us a name for our shampoo, regardless of whether it wins or not, will be given an opportunity to win the $8000.00 first prize or one of the other one hundred cash prizes.

PARIS AMERICAN PHARMACAL CO.

1224 McCune Bldg., Des Moines, Iowa.

Nothing to Buy—Nothing to Sell

There is nothing to buy or sell—simply the person sending the best and most suitable suggestion for a name will receive the $1000 cash prize, or if prompt, $1100 in all.

$100.00 Extra For Promptness

To get quick action, we are going to pay the winner an extra $100.00 for promptness, or $1100.00 in all, so send your suggestion AT ONCE!

CONTEST RULES

This contest is open to everyone except members of this firm, its employees and relatives.

Each contestant may send only one name. Sending two or more names will cause all names submitted by that person to be thrown out.

Contest closes April 30, 1930. Duplicate prizes will be given in case of ties.

To win the promptness prize of $100.00 extra, the winning name suggested must be mailed within three days after our announcement is read.

$1000.00 NAME COUPON

PARIS AMERICAN PHARMACAL CO.,
1224 McCune Bldg., Des Moines, Iowa.

Enclosed with this coupon on separate sheet is my suggestion for a name.

Date this announcement was read.....

Date my suggestion is mailed.....

Name.....

Address.....

NOTE: Being prompt qualifies you for the extra $100.00 as outlined in this announcement.

ALL-STORY

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Cinderella On Broadway

He looked up—and stifled an exclamation of dismay!

When the clock struck twelve Francine's brave little masquerade was over. But this Cinderella got another chance!

By Beulah Poynter

Author of "Remembered Rapture," etc.

THE Farleys were having a conference in the shabby sitting room of the suite they occupied at the Elite Hotel. Ma Farley (billed on the program as Genevieve Taylor), red-nosed and swollen-eyed, sat hunched on the sagging green upholstered sofa. Her golden transformation was askew, her weak pretty mouth tremulous, her chin quivering.

Pa Farley paced the floor, his hands jammed into the pockets of a threadworn jacket, his black brows drawn over a really fine nose. His lips were

twitching, and his skin—always too white in contrast to his dyed hair and mustache—was pallid.

Frank, the only son and recently leading man, stood motionless beside a marble-topped table, staring at a yellow slip of paper.

Francine, half forgotten and of small consequence, huddled her slim little body on a footstool beneath the window and cupped her pointed chin in her hands. Her gray eyes, opaque and flecked with gold, wandered from one tense face to another. A cloud of black curls tumbled about her shoulders and shadowed her small features. Francine was seventeen, but she looked like a child of twelve in the straight frock of rusty black velvet that scarcely covered her knees and hung in ugly folds about her delicate curves.

"Put your transformation in place, Ma." Frank's voice, a trifle rasping and showing the effects of taut nerves, broke the silence.

Ma's hand fluttered to her head and patted the brassy hair. Then suddenly she burst into audible weeping.

"Don't!" jerked Pa Farley. "Vera will hear you."

"I can't help it," moaned his wife. "To think it should come at this time—when she can't accept it! To think how ambitious Vera has always been and how she has worked! To have this opportunity when she's flat on her back and maybe—won't ever act again!"

"Read that telegram once more, Frank," Pa Farley said to his son.

Frank coughed and read aloud:

MISS VERA FARLEY,
Steubenville, Pa.

I saw a performance last week. Believe you have real ability which is being wasted where you are. If you are ambitious and willing to work, I have a place for you in my new production, "Ashes!" Communicate with me, Dorset Building, Broadway, New York, at once and will give you further particulars.

SYDNEY BREWSTER.

"Sydney Brewster," Pa murmured. "Somehow I can't get over it. Him seeing our show at all and wanting Vera. Why, his shows don't even go on the road! They never play anything but New York and Boston and Philadelphia and Chicago."

"Vera always wanted to get on Broadway," wailed Ma. "She wasn't ever satisfied with repertoire. She knew she was too good for it. This proves she is. She may never know she's had this offer. Her sick in bed with pneumonia!"

FRANCINE rose slowly and crossed to the marble-topped table. There was a hard glitter of determination and unshed tears in her gray eyes.

"Just what are you worrying about?" she demanded. "The fact that Vera can't accept this engagement and pull us all out of a hole—or the fact that the poor kid is so sick that Sydney Brewster or Podunkville means the same thing to her?"

"Francine!" gasped her mother in a shocked voice. She sat up abruptly and dabbed at her eyes with a wisp of orange silk.

"I don't say you aren't feeling bad because Vera is sick. I know you are. But since that telegram has come you've all acted as though nothing mattered so much as an engagement with Sydney Brewster. Who is he, anyway?"

"Who is he?" Pa stalked closer. "He's had more successes in three

years than any other producer in ten. Vera would be *made* if she worked for him."

"And I suppose we'd all cut in on her success?" Francine's tone was still hard.

"Our children's success is ours, naturally," from Ma.

"It's been a terrible season," Pa said. "We couldn't have stayed open two weeks more even if Vera hadn't been taken sick. It would mean a lot if she landed on Broadway."

"If Vera doesn't get well—" Francine's gaze shifted to the double doors hung with faded red damask. "She'll never act any place again, let alone Broadway. I think it's shameful to be talking of Broadway, when we don't know she'll even live until morning."

"Francine, how dare you!" Pa rumbled. "Talking that way to your parents! Don't we love Vera? Aren't we worried to death about her? She's the biggest attraction the show has."

"There you go again! Attraction! Of course Vera is an attraction, but she's your daughter—your own flesh and blood, not just an attraction! If you'd thought of that three days ago instead of just saving the show, Vera might not be so near death now! If you had put her to bed instead of making her work! If—"

"That 'll do," Pa interrupted hotly. "When you've been in the theater as long as I have, you'll know that nothing—*nothing*—counts as much as saving the show. It's an honor to die in harness. Great actors have done it. Your sister wouldn't have gone home. She wouldn't disappoint her audience."

For a moment Pa looked magnificent, with his shoulders erect, his eyes flashing with pride, and his face suffused with color.

"I don't see any great honor in saving the performance of a punk repertoire show," Francine retorted gloomily. "I could have played her part anyway."

"The audience came to see Vera," her mother reminded her.

"Well, they saw me the next night; and I don't think they knew the difference, or cared. If she dies, we've killed her—that's what we've done." She blinked hard and gripped her hands into two tight little fists.

"Can it, Sis," the boy at the table muttered. "We all love Vera as much as you do. It's a rotten break all around. We're stranded here without enough cash to get us out of town if Pa pays the actors. Then this telegram comes when the only thing we can do is to send a polite refusal."

"And Sydney Brewster pays big salaries," Mrs. Farley wailed. "D'ye suppose, Oscar, if we wired him Vera was sick, he might hold the part open for her?"

"We could wire him when do rehearsals begin, where and what's the salary. That might stall him until Vera gets on her feet," her son answered. "Think I'll do it."

FRANCINE shrugged her shoulders. The gesture was one she had learned from her sister, who found it effective in disdainful parts. With no intent to be theatric, the little girl swept a glance of scorn over the group, parted the curtains, and went into the bedroom where Vera lay very close to death.

She crossed on tiptoe to the bed, her hands clasped over her childish bosom, her white upper teeth cutting cruelly into her red lower lip. Ma might weep aloud, Pa pace the floor and wring his hands in agony, but she was deter-

mined to be mistress of her emotions. Her throat ached painfully, and the unshed tears made her eyes sting as though full of cosmetic, but they remained dry.

Vera, the star of the Farley Repertoire Company, billed on the posters as America's youngest emotional actress, lay flushed with fever in the sagging iron bedstead near the window. With her black hair tousled about the pillow and her eyes closed, there was a decided resemblance to her younger sister. Vera was taller, three years older, and somewhat thinner, but any one seeing the two girls for the first time would have recognized the relationship.

Spread about the room, with its dingy wall paper, maple dresser and rocking chair, were the tawdry trappings of the sick girl's profession. A huge tailor trunk, the lid thrown open, occupied a quarter of the space. "Vera Farley" was painted in white letters upon it. Yellow labels were pasted all over it with the words "Farley Repertoire Co. Theater." On the face of the lid clippings from newspapers had been stuck: half tones of Vera and criticisms.

Over a chair was flung a much worn raccoon coat. It had been discarded two nights before when the girl had returned from the theater already in the first stages of pneumonia. No one had hung it up. Below it was a pair of black satin slippers with run-over stilt-like heels. On another chair was a sleazy red satin dress and a little red toque. The bureau was a clutter of bottles, jars and powder boxes. Combs, brushes, and two wigs, one auburn, one pale gold. A leather make-up box rested in the center.

Francine moved quietly about the room, knowing that the sick girl was not conscious of her presence, yet fearful of disturbing her with any noise. She lifted the red dress and shook out its folds. A cheap strand of pearl beads fell to the floor. She placed them on the dresser, then hung the dress and coat in the fumed oak wardrobe and began to straighten out the toilette articles on the bureau.

Francine was used to disorder. She had been reared in its midst, but a need of physical action drove her to tidy the place. The murmur of voices in the parlor came to her, but she heard nothing they said.

Brewster's telegram meant very little to her except to make her wonder if by any chance he could be the man she had seen last week in the theater. It didn't seem possible, for a successful manager should be old, and this man had been young.

She had taken tickets at the door that night, as she often did, and had noticed the tall, handsome stranger; first because he had been so different from any one who entered the theater; second because he was the first man who had ever made her conscious that she was a woman.

Not that he did anything. Francine did not believe that he even saw her, but a strange embarrassment had made her tremble when his fingers, handing her the ticket, had touched hers. Every feature of his face was stamped on her memory. And there had since been a little aché in her heart that she would never see him again, never know him.

But he couldn't have been Brewster. That stranger could never have thought Vera a great actress. Francine adored her sister, but she had no illusions about her ability. Better than her surroundings, yes, but not good enough for Broadway. That telegram had puzzled her. It didn't ring true. A

big producer seeing a cheap stock company performance, then offering its leading woman a part on Broadway! There was a catch in it some place.

Last summer, at great denial, the family had staked Vera to a trip to New York. For two months Vera had tried to get entrée to various producers. She had returned heartsick and discontented to continue as her father's leading woman. And now Sydney Brewster offered her an engagement, and she was dying!

FRANCINE studied the white face on the pillow. Both she and Vera had their father's features: slender nose, delicately curved lips. Oscar Farley came of good English stock. The girls had inherited innate refinement and beauty that no environment could destroy.

She and Vera looked a lot alike. If Ma didn't make her wear that yellow wig on the stage, people could scarcely tell them apart. Too bad she wasn't a good actress; strange, too, when she had practically been born in the theater, had spent most of her babyhood on Ma's trunk in the dressing room, and been carried on the stage for her first part. Too bad, since the folks were so crazy to have one of the family on Broadway, that Brewster didn't want her.

Not that she had any ambitions that way. Some day she intended to marry and have a garden and babies, and a husband who looked like the stranger she had seen in Steubenville.

The girl drew the window shade and went back into the sitting room. Another man had joined the group. He was about Frank's age, twenty-five, blond, florid, and decidedly good-looking in a rather blatant style. His necktie was a little too loud, his shoes too highly polished, and the crease in his trousers a trifle too pronounced. But Horace Lockridge, next to Vera, was the most popular member of the Farley Company. The family all cordially disliked him, despite the mash notes he received, and his presence was only explained by the fact that Pa owed him back salary.

Lockridge was sitting beside Ma Farley now, a nervous smile on his face. Pa was again pacing the floor, but bristling with indignation.

"I think it's the most heartless, inhuman thing I ever heard of," Ma said as Francine entered the room. "You all know we're just worried to death about Vera, you know we haven't made a penny since Christmas—and we've doctor bills and everything piling up on us—and now to demand your salaries—"

"Well, look at it this way, can't you?" Horace broke in impatiently. "We're sorry for you, but we gotta live. We can't stay here stranded in this punk burg paying hotel bills. We gotta get to Chicago and find work. We can't go without money."

"My star may be dying, but you blood-suckers want the last penny we have!" thundered the old man.

"Not that bad," Lockridge drawled. "We figured on a benefit. One performance would probably get the rest of us out of town, and we'd take I. O. U.'s for the balance due us."

"A benefit now!" gasped Mrs. Farley.

"Why not?" Lockridge turned his china-blue eyes toward her. "The natives would flock in droves to see you, knowing you are in trouble. Do 'Colleen Bawn'!"

"Without Vera?"

"The kid here," indicating Fran-

cine, "could get by in the part. Shouldn't be surprised if she'd give as good a performance as Vera."

Mrs. Farley swelled with indignation. "We've never claimed any talent for Francine, but Vera has genius. Even Sydney Brewster recognizes it. He wants her for his new play, 'Ashes.'"

"Wha-at!" Lockridge lost his nonchalance.

Frank tossed the telegram to him. A strange expression shot across Lockridge's bland countenance as he read it. "What d'ye know about this?" he whistled. "Tough break, Vera's illness, isn't it? What did you wire Brewster?"

"We stalled him, of course," Frank answered tersely.

"Vera on Broadway would put you folks on Easy Street." Lockridge closed his eyes speculatively. He handed the telegram back to Frank. "Gosh, I hope she gets well, for your sake as well as hers."

Francine's cheeks flamed crimson.

"Poor Vera!" she cried indignantly. "You pretended to be in love with her, Horace Lockridge, and now all you think about is her chance for success. I hope she gets well because I love her, but I almost hope she gets well too late to work for Brewster!"

"Francine!" expostulated her mother.

"Tell the company," the girl went on, "we'll give the benefit and get you out of town. I'll ape Vera the best I can because I never want to see any of you again!"

MEANWHILE Sydney Brewster, cause of so much expectation, sat in a luxurious office in a modern Broadway skyscraper. Facing him was an irate young woman in a voluminous coat of rich mink, a smart felt hat just covering auburn hair, and a very Parisian frock of brown chiffon velvet.

Brewster was young, exceedingly young to have achieved so much importance in an overcrowded profession. And he looked less than his years as he sat there with the cold January sunlight falling upon his chestnut-colored hair and slightly ironical hazel eyes. There was a cold, cynical smile on his handsome face, a smile that made his erstwhile star and ex-fiancée desirous of slapping him.

"Do you mean to say," Lola Bancroft choked, "that you've given the part you wrote for me to an absolutely unknown?"

"If she accepts," he nodded. "I've wired the salary and the date of rehearsals. Next week."

"*Next week!* You weren't going to begin until March."

"I've changed my mind. If the terms satisfy, Miss Vera Farley will appear as *Lotus* in 'Ashes' at the Crescent Theater the third week in March."

"You're mad! Absolutely raving mad!" Lola flung her jeweled purse on the mahogany desk and sprang to her feet. "Every one is expecting a flop from you. They're saying you're too cocksure of yourself, that success has come too easy, and that you can't always be turning pennies into dollars. Well, this will prove they are right!"

"Yes? And I suppose I would continue successful if you played the part?"

"Why not? I'm popular. I've made you money."

"You weren't popular when I found you."

"I could act!"

"Granted. And you were beautiful.

But if I am cocksure of myself, so are you, my dear. Pride rides to a fall—all right, we'll see who falls first."

"You're doing this just to strike back at me." Her cheeks were ashen under the skillfully applied rouge. "Using the pettiest, meanest revenge you are capable of. A girl from a cheap rep show in my place!"

"You forget she may be clever."

"You said she wasn't."

"Acting is a matter of opinion. They think she's great in Steubenville. And she is lovely—and young. Much younger than you, my dear."

The woman shrugged her shoulders angrily. "You deliberately scouted the country to find some one to humiliate me!"

"Perhaps. You forget—" He leaned across the flat desk. The cynical smile vanished, replaced by a grave, almost pathetic expression. "You humiliated me. You forget that I loved you, that my only desire for success was to give you what you wanted—fame, jewels, luxuries; and that just as I had achieved that desire I learned that your object in accepting my love was to reach stardom, and that you really loved some one else!"

"YOU don't know that," she retorted thickly. "Hearsay!"

"Hearsay, nothing!" He rose also and stood before her, tall, lithe, commanding, his eyes almost black with the indignation that made his voice husky and vibrant. "Do you think I would give credence to any of the malicious reports that are circulated about prominent women? Our profession is a hotbed of gossip; no one before the public eye escapes tattle. No, nothing that any one said about you and Norman Keith weighed with me. I *know*."

"You can't know anything," she said. She opened her bag and extracted a cigarette from a jewel-incrusted case, but her hand shook as she carried it to her mouth. Under her long lashes her yellow eyes gleamed like a cat's.

"Ah, but I do. I was behind the back drop the night 'Lorna Leigh' closed, and I heard the scene between you and Keith. Everything."

The cigarette snapped. "You were welcome to anything you heard," she said, her voice strident. "If a little light banter—"

"Banter! You told him you loved him, that you had no intention of marrying me—that once you saw your name in electric lights you would throw me over and become his wife. Was that banter?"

"Surely." Her brazen eyes met his. "Keith knew I was kidding."

"He did! When he took you in his arms and begged you to throw ambition to the winds, he knew you were kidding, did he? When you kissed him and swore you never loved any one but him, that was kidding?"

She bowed her head until her pink cleft chin was lost in the folds of fur. "Yes."

"Then, by God, you're viler than I thought! Actress on and actress off! I'd rather you were at least honest with him than to find you cheap!"

"Cheap!" she shrilled.

"Yes, cheap! Indiscriminate kisses, lies—the tawdry sale of your affections! When I remember what you meant to me—"

She swept majestically to the door.

"The Farley girl may not be able to act," he flung after her, "but I'll make the public buy her! I'll blazon her name from the Bronx to the Battery. I'll make it a household word. And when she's more popular than you ever

thought of being I'll show the world how easy it is to make a star—show them just what you might have been!"

"Joy to you in the making! Only don't crumble among your ruins!"

THE benefit had been played. Mrs. Farley, heartsick and miserable, had remained at the bedside of her elder daughter while the rest of the family went to the theater. Francine, wearing her own jetty locks instead of the unbecoming blond wig, had stumbled through the rôle.

There had been a crowded house. Curiosity had drawn the townspeople. The news of the star's illness had spread, and, without intending to be heartless, they had thronged to the theater to see how the stricken family acquitted themselves in the face of disaster.

In her dressing room Francine smiled wanly and thanked the members of the company for their praise.

"You were splendid," the character woman informed her. "Vera never played the part better."

"Pa has been hiding your light under a bushel," said Horace. "Make him give you better parts after this."

Better parts! After the actors were paid and out of town there'd be no money to carry on!

"Pretty good, Sis," was Frank's comment. "Didn't know you had it in you."

"Hurry, Francine," was all Pa said. His face was aged and drawn. The performance had been a terrible strain. Professional integrity at stake, his youngest child unsuited to the part—worry over Vera—financial matters—

The company, with the exception of Lockridge, took the midnight train for New York. He, with unusual display of concern for Vera's condition, did not intend to leave town for a few days.

Francine slipped into her brown cloth coat, pulled a red hat over her tumbled black hair and left the dressing room with her father. At the stage door they were halted by the house manager.

"This came during the show," he said, extending a yellow envelope. "I thought I'd better wait to give it to you after the performance was over."

Pa tore the flap and read the message silently, then passed it on to Frank. "Five hundred a week!" the boy gasped. "And rehearsals next week! What a break!"

None of the trio spoke during the short walk from the theater to the hotel. The snow, crusted to ice, crunched under their heels and the sound seemed a knell to all their hopes. Vera, well, would mean salvation. They loved her, but the wolf at the door, the doctors' bills and hotel bills—her illness was a double misfortune.

Francine, glancing up at Pa's despairing face, plainly visible under the arc light at the corner, felt her heart contract. How pitiful it was! Her little bare hand reached for his and squeezed it.

"I wish I were a good actress and Brewster wanted me," she thought. "Then I could put Pa on his feet again."

The hotel office was in semi-darkness when they entered. A drowsy clerk behind the desk gave Frank his key. "Reckon you just missed Dr. Horn," he informed them. "He went out of here a few minutes ago."

Pa's eyes had a stricken look in them as they turned to Francine. "I hope that doesn't mean Vera is worse," he mumbled.

Suddenly Francine knew that her

sister was dead. Knew that her mother —true to the traditions of the theater —had fought her battle alone, rather than send for her loved ones and ruin the show.

"I'll play Vera's part because I never want to see you again!"

Swaying unsteadily, the girl ran up the flight of stairs, down the dark corridor and flung open the parlor door. A low wail greeted her. The next moment her strong arms were about her mother.

"You've still got me, Ma," Francine crooned. "You've still got me, and I'll be a good actress yet."

DURING the harrowing days that followed Vera's death, Sydney Brewster's second telegram was forgotten. It lay on the marble-topped table in the parlor, mute testimony to the glory that might have been Vera's, and was found by Horace Lockridge after they returned from the cemetery, where they had left all that remained of the one they adored.

While Francine heated some water over a sterno lamp to make tea for Ma, Horace motioned to Frank.

"You know something?" he said in a whisper, so that Pa Farley could not hear. "I'd answer Brewster's telegram and accept the engagement without another moment's thought."

Frank looked at him dully.

"Francine's not a half bad actress," Horace continued. "Really she made me sit up. With a chance she'd make good. Wait"—as the other started to speak—"I know it may sound like cheating to you. But it wouldn't be. She looks enough like Vera to be her twin. A man who only saw Vera once, and then across the footlights, would never recognize the difference. You folks always thought Vera great. I felt she wasn't, she was just pretty and young, and had magnetism. That's what Brewster wants, not genius, and Francine can give him that."

Frank still stared at him, but his face had grown whiter.

"You'd not be hurting Vera any—now—if Francine took her name. And you know something has to be done. Pa can't pay the hotel bill, let alone the other expenses. Then," Horace's light eyes closed speculatively, "why not give the kid a chance? She's been kept in the background all her life. If she gets ahead you'd go with her."

Frank drew a long breath. "I'll speak to Pa about it."

Strangely, Pa Farley agreed that Lockridge's advice was good. Vera's name would be perpetuated. And Francine—well, Francine had surprised him at the benefit.

Ma Farley demurred, but five hundred dollars was a very large salary. Even if Francine got her notice after the first performance there'd be two weeks' salary due her. A thousand dollars! A fortune for the Farleys at this time!

Francine, her heart like a rock, listened to their arguments for and against. She wanted to help. There wasn't anything she wouldn't do to help them, but she was terrified at the thought of leaving her parents, of going to a great city to compete with seasoned and clever actresses in an overcrowded profession.

And most of all she was terrified at the thought of meeting Sydney Brewster. If he should be the handsome young man—

"I've still got my sunburst," she heard Ma say. "I've hung on to it because you gave it to me, Pa, the first Christmas we were married; but I guess I can part with it if it means Francine's future."

Francine's future! Already they were throwing a glamour about her.

"If she makes good," Pa said, "we'll join her in no time. I have no worry for Francine. She's a good girl and practical, but she's too young not to have her parents beside her."

She was going then. It was settled. She was to become Vera Farley.

"I've just got to make good for Vera's sake," Francine whispered between set teeth.

BREWSTER looked up from the manuscript he was correcting. His office boy, a freckled faced youth with teeth too far apart, grinned impishly.

"Well?" snapped the producer.

"There's a dame outside says she's gotta see yuh. I told her you was busy, but she said she was gonna see you if she had to sit there all night."

"What's her name?"

"Farley. If yuh ask me I'd say she's from the sticks—"

"I'm not asking you. Send her in."

The boy whistled under his breath and disappeared.

The scowl on Brewster's face deepened. He closed the blue covered manuscript, pushed back his chair and waited. Already he was regretting the impulse that had caused him to seek a petty revenge upon the woman who had destroyed his faith in her sex and injured his pride. Love might be of tremendous importance, but it was not all of life. His gesture in engaging Vera Farley might ruin his entire future.

"Mr.—Mr. Brewster?" a timid voice came from the doorway.

He turned and stifled an exclamation of dismay.

A girl in a very shabby raccoon coat stood there. She wore a red satin gown, much the worse for home cleaning, a black picture hat and white cotton gloves. She was pale, with a vivid red mouth, full lipped and sensitively curved. Her great eyes, curiously gold-

flecked and thick lashed, were shadowed. Inky black ringlets hung in thick confusion about her neck.

A weird, grotesque little figure in stage finery! But, good Lord, how young she was! Younger than she had looked over the footlights—and pretty! Why her face—her chin—her nose were as clean chiseled as a cameo, and her eyes were like moss agates.

In spite of her outrageous costume the girl was a beauty!

"Miss Farley?" he managed.

"Yes, sir." Francine's pulses were pounding. He *was* the same man! She was so frightened and so happy she thought she would faint.

"Sit down, won't you?" He pushed a chair toward her.

She accepted it, painfully conscious that he had noticed her patched shoes and the mended run in her stockings.

"I saw you in—"

"Steubenville," she supplied. "Yes, sir."

"And decided I could use you in my new play. The contracts are ready for you to sign."

He opened a drawer, drew out two legal documents and handed them to her. His heart sank lower as he watched her hunt for the line of signature, then, without reading the papers, sign her name. Obviously she had never signed a contract before.

"Rehearsals begin Monday at the Hudson Theater. You know where it is?"

"I can find it." She smiled and the smile lifted some of the weary expression from her face and gave it added beauty.

"Good voice," he thought. "Better off than on." Then, aloud: "Where are you stopping?"

"Why—" She colored as she named a boarding house Pa had chosen from an advertisement in "Variety." Intuitively she realized that this immaculate young man who was going to pay her five hundred dollars a week for her services would not approve of Mrs. Black's.

He shook his head.

"I'd rather you moved to some hotel nearer. I insist upon promptness. With the traffic congestion it's next to impossible to keep appointments on time if one lives beyond walking distance."

"Yes, sir."

"If you are in need of money I shall be pleased to advance you some."

The sudden light in her eyes informed him she was not only in need, but desperately so.

SHE was very thin, fragile, but it was the fragility of adolescence. Good Lord, how old was she? He wanted to ask her, but refrained. And pitiful. Why, he'd feel an absolute rotter if compelled to give her her notice. Dollars to doughnuts he'd have to. No clothes sense, and timid as a hare.

Poor little kid. She didn't belong in the show business. Should be married, with some man caring for her.

Then he checked himself. Suppose she appealed to others' sympathy as she appealed to his? That quality was invaluable in an actress. Shrewd showman that he was, Brewster realized the successful actress was the one popular with women. Charm counted more than sex. This child possessed great charm. Lola Bancroft was like a flame, searing, devastating in her ability to tear emotions to tatters, but she lacked the heart touch. She did not stir the soul because she had no soul. He had deluded himself into believing she possessed one. This child

was full of soul. Well, he'd give the Farley girl her chance. If she failed—

"Had lunch?" he asked abruptly.

"No, sir," Francine answered truthfully. Oh, dear! Suppose he forgot about advancing the money. She had but a dollar in her purse. Pa had told her she could draw on her salary, but she simply couldn't ask him for money.

"All right. We'll walk around the corner to the bank and I'll cash a check, then we'll have a bite."

Brewster wasn't certain why he extended the invitation. Until the advent of Lola and his disastrous love for her his relations with his employees had been strictly business. And this girl, in her outlandish clothing, was little less than a scarecrow, but she looked—well actually hungry. He drew on an overcoat, jammed a hat over his crisp chestnut hair and opened the door for her.

Francine lost some of her timidity in the sweep of pride she felt when she stepped into the elevator with Brewster. This man of vast importance was her employer. This man, whose one glance in the little Pennsylvania town had thrilled her, was to be her daily companion. It was like a dream come true.

A first stir of ambition fluttered her bosom. Before she had been determined to make good for the family's sake, but now she wanted to achieve success for *him*. She was cheating him in assuming her sister's name, but if she gave value received her crime would not be so heinous.

If she were just a good actress! He was so wonderful. How kind he had been—pretending not to notice her shabbiness—her embarrassment. She wondered why she was so terribly nervous. Strangers had never affected her that way before. Maybe it was because she was so anxious to please.

BREWSTER stepped briskly out of the elevator. His cheeks were burning. He felt certain those other men had been laughing at his companion. Dolts! Couldn't they see she was a beauty in spite of her clothes? Wait till she was dressed stylishly.

Francine, following, saw him stop abruptly at the revolving doors. A gorgeously attired woman in mink and orchids came toward him with outstretched hand, and a cheerful: "Why, hello, Syd!"

Sudden shame engulfed the little girl from the rep show. Shame for her shoddy finery, her gaucheness. When Lola's insolent yellow eyes turned upon her she wanted to run.

"And this is Miss Farley, your new star, eh, Syd? Do introduce us. The fallen star should meet the rising one."

"Miss Bancroft, Miss Farley," Brewster snapped. "Sorry I can't stay, Lola. I'm in a big hurry."

"Naturally," she drawled. "But I'll drop in to rehearsals next week."

His fallen star! *She* was to take the place of that beautiful woman in furs and diamonds. Why? When she was nobody and shabby! During the short walk Francine's thoughts raced. Why? A side glance at Brewster's scowling face informed her of a great deal. No man ever scowled that way after a chance encounter with a woman unless he loved her—or hated her.

Francine's heart thumped painfully. The sudden bright hope that had buoyed her spirits vanished.

If Brewster loved Lola Bancroft success would mean very little to *her*. In that moment Francine learned all the sweetness and bitterness of love.

Love had sprung to birth with her first glance at Brewster, and now jealousy came to torment her. Brewster might never care for her, but as long as he loved no one else she could be content. But if he did love that woman—

She mustn't be silly. She was hired to play a part, not to fall in love with a producer. What would Pa think?

In the bank Brewster cashed a check, handed her a new one hundred dollar bill. Gave it to her as though hundred dollar bills were no more than dimes. Francine was almost shocked at his nonchalance. Then he took her arm and piloted her across the street, through the traffic that still appalled her.

Her arm still tingled from the pressure of his fingers when they entered a tea shop, and there was a luminous glow in her eyes.

He led her to a corner table, obscured from the view of the other patrons, and drew a chair for her, after assisting her out of her coat.

"Do you mind taking off your hat?" he asked. The velvet atrocity offended him more than anything else.

She obeyed him. Without the hat, with the soft glow of a shaded lamp falling upon her features and turning to glistening jet her tumble of curls, she was breath-takingly lovely.

Sydney Brewster adored beauty. It had been Lola's beauty that had first attracted him, but never at any time had Lola been as lovely as this ebon-haired child. Feasting his eyes on her flushed expectant face he forgot the pain his chance encounter with Lola had occasioned.

"She'll have to be pretty terrible not to get over," he thought. Then he ventured: "I wish you'd let me take you to a shop I know, where you'll get a discount, and purchase you a new outfit. That—er—that one is a little too elaborate for rehearsals. My actresses dress plainly."

For a second Francine's chin quivered. He realized he had hurt her, and with quick sympathy he placed his hand on hers. "I want you to look smart," he said. "Women can be awful cats. I want you to look your best."

"I'm sure you do," she answered bravely. "I'll be very grateful if you'll take me."

His hand still rested on hers. He found the touch very pleasant. She was a sweet kid. Gad! He hoped he wouldn't have to fire her.

ALTHOUGH Francine had deeply loved her sister and her death had left a great ache in her heart, she was too young to be weighted down all the time. The gates of fairy land were opened to her, and, being but little more than a child, she stepped inside. The hundred dollar bill was a fairy wand, the handsome young man who seated himself beside her in the taxicab was Prince Charming, and she loved him!

Every nerve in her exquisitely sensitive little body tingled. Fifty of that hundred dollars was to be turned into a money order for Pa. Twenty-five would buy her new outfit, and she would live on the other twenty-five until "Ashes" opened.

Francine had no knowledge of smart shop prices or of good hotel rates. She was completely staggered at the cost of the gowns the saleslady brought out for her approval. She had never dreamed anything could be so expensive. Ma had always made her dresses from remnants picked up at sales.

One hundred and fifty dollars for that blue flat crape! Why, it was completely beyond her means. But if Mr.

Brewster insisted—and was going to take it out of her salary, of course—Then she remembered Lola and her cynical smile. In that blue dress Francine could be quite as stylish as the other woman. And, oh, dear, she did want to be stylish!

She was unaware of it, but the same urge that prompted her to be well dressed was what caused Brewster to spend money on her in a way that would have amazed his associates. Lola had laughed at her successor, had she? Well, he'd show her he had a find!

If clothes make the man, they more than make the woman. In the blue crape Francine was charming, but in the flame-colored velvet the saleslady insisted she try on she was utterly ravishing.

A light shot through Brewster's eyes. If only she could act she'd be a knock out. Her figure was perfect, her hair luxurious, like a storm cloud, and those marvelous tragic child eyes!

"I'll take that gown also," he said.

"But—" Francine's lips parted, closed.

"I'll use it in the play," he explained.

The black velvet evening wrap, lined with flame satin and bordered with blue fox, was also for the play, and the Krimmer coat, priced at five hundred and purchased for four hundred and fifty. A Vionnet model was fitted on Francine's black locks. Suède pumps replaced her patched shoes. Even a new purse of blue leather replaced her old one.

"Wear the fur coat," Brewster said quietly, as the saleslady wrote out the order. "I'll have the evening coat and dress sent to your hotel."

It was all very amazing to Francine. Pa had never furnished any of his company with wardrobe, though she knew Broadway producers did so. It seemed very strange that she should wear anything intended for a play upon the street. But if Mr. Brewster said for her to do so, she must obey.

Even the next day, when the flame-colored gown and evening wrap arrived at the hotel where she had been assigned a room, accompanied by a card from Brewster bearing his compliments, Francine only blinked her eyes, decided she was living in a fairy story and danced happily about the room.

Others more sophisticated would have said the young manager had deep ulterior motives behind his generosity. Had Francine known any of her profession in the city her house of dreams would surely have been shattered, but she knew no one, and she had never heard of ulterior motives in her life.

Sydney Brewster *did* have a motive—of a kind. While he denied that he still loved Lola Bancroft the hurt rankled. The meeting in his office building and her taunting laughter determined him to show her that he could not only dispense with her services, but be better off without them. If she thought he was going to eat his heart out in seclusion she was vastly mistaken. He'd go everywhere that he had used to visit with her, and he'd have as his companion the prettiest and best dressed woman on Broadway. Francine was the prettiest, he'd make her the best dressed!

WITH the pillows piled under her head and the manuscript of her part in the play spread out before her, Francine lay studying. It was a splendid rôle, that of a young girl, charming, gay, emotional and dramatic. Though just reading it over

thrilled Francine, she could not keep her thoughts from wandering.

She recalled every word that Sydney Brewster had spoken to her, she treasured the tones of his voice, the remembrance of his touch on her arm. Day dreams tangled themselves among her realities. Day dreams of Brewster as the one who was to share her cottage and raise flowers in a cunning garden, and help build the home she had never known.

In the dress Francine was—beautiful!

She had written Ma a long letter the night before, and had inclosed a money order. She had tried on all the new gowns several times, rearranged her hair into a soft loose knot at the nape of her neck in imitation of Lola Bancroft, and tried in various ways to banish homesickness.

But even dreams of Brewster—dreams she knew to be vain—the new, expensive hotel room, and the attractive clothing she could see through the open closet door could not drive away loneliness and the ache for those she loved.

Did they miss her very much? She would have to earn a great deal of money, so they could join her soon and the family be together. Only Vera would be missing.

She wondered if she were doing a very wicked thing in deceiving Brewster. If he learned she was not the girl to whom he had offered the engagement, would he discharge her? Oh, God, please make me a good actress! A better actress than Lola Bancroft.

Two big tears rolled down her cheeks. She brushed them away and tried to concentrate on her lines.

Sydney Brewster was wonderful.

When he smiled— If she just didn't feel so nervous with him and smothery. She'd never been nervous with any one that way before.

To-morrow would be Sunday, then Monday rehearsals would begin. She'd be scared to death. Mr. Brewster directed his own plays. She hoped he would be kind, not grow impatient like Pa, and storm to create an effect.

The telephone bell rang. A little startled Francine slipped from the bed and crossed to a table where the machine rested.

"Ye-es?" she quavered. Then she grew dizzy as Brewster's voice came over the wire.

"I thought," he said casually, "that you might be lonesome. How would you like to spend an hour or two at a night club?"

"I—I'd love it!" Francine gasped. She had never been to a night club in her life.

"All right. Slip into the new evening gown. I'll be around for you in half an hour."

IT never occurred to Sydney Brewster that the little girl whom he had transformed into a beautiful woman might fall in love with him. Or that his intentions and kindness might be misconstrued. His one object was to hurt the girl who had so humiliated him.

Knowing Lola, he was certain that his presence at the Clover Club with a young, attractive actress, a potential star, would almost drive her distracted. Lola might never have loved him, but she was eaten up with professional jealousy. She could never love Norman Keith or any man as much as she loved herself and her position in the theater.

He chose a table some distance from the door. To reach it he had to guide Francine, a radiant vision in black and flame color, across the dancing space, past innumerable small tables and diners. He was well aware they were the cynosure of all eyes. Unquestionably if Lola was there her chagrin would be maddening.

Lola *was* there.

Very much in evidence in oyster white satin and orchids, dancing languidly in Norman's embrace. Norman Keith was a rising young juvenile, quite as ambitious as Lola herself.

Only half in love with the auburn-haired woman, his desire to marry her was actuated by the assistance to his own future he fancied there would be in such an alliance. Lola as Brewster's star could do a great deal for him. Lola, without Brewster, was merely a clever, pretty actress, and there were many such on Broadway looking for engagements. Preferably he would remain single.

Since he had just learned that her contract for "Ashes" had been canceled as well as her engagement to Brewster broken, he was not in a pleasant frame of mind. Neither was Lola, who, loving him as much as she was capable of loving any one, realized the shallowness of his regard for her.

"Of course," she said bitterly, "if you'd rather I patched up my quarrel with Syd and married him, I'll do it. I have only to whistle and he'll come back."

"Good Lord! No!" He was trying to hide the eagerness in his eyes.

"But that would be your finish," she added.

"I'll never give you up, Lola, nor share you with another man!" he said dramatically.

She laughed. Then she saw Francine. Keith's eyes followed her gaze.

"Who's the swell baby with Syd?" he ejaculated.

"His new star. A rep actress. Look how he's trigged her out." Lola's lips curled scornfully, but her heart beat so hard it was sickening.

"He picks 'em young, I'll say. By Jove, she's a stunner." Keith drew her from the dancing floor. "If I were you, I'd humble my pride into the dust before I'd let that girl take my place. With his money, her youth and looks—"

"Bah!" Lola snapped her fingers. "I saw her day before yesterday. She was dowdy and common. He's dressed her up to make me look cheap. She can't act. I'm not afraid. She can't hurt me."

But Lola was afraid. She was determined Vera Farley should never play the part Brewster had written for *her,* not if she had to crawl on her knees to her ex-lover to get it back. Not if it meant giving up Norman Keith.

AND Brewster, watching the expression on her face, visible to him in a mirror beside him, smiled cynically. His triumph was quite complete. To-morrow Broadway would buzz about his public appearance with his new star.

To add to Lola's chagrin, knowing she was watching every move he made, he leaned across the table and took one of Francine's hands.

"You look very lovely, my dear," he said.

Francine's flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes thanked him for the compliment. When Brewster asked her if she cared to dance she rose readily and slipped into his arms. But her knees were quivering under her, and she was almost overcome with the languid sweetness that blurred the lights and made the dancers about her but gray shadows floating in rhythm to the music.

"She's a sweet child," Brewster thought, tightening his clasp. "Rather good fun to play around with."

Passing Lola's table he drew Francine closer, and for the breath of a second touched his cheek to hers. Francine's heart leaped. Her great eyes, golden under the lights, met his in startled interrogation. At his smile she relaxed with a happy little sigh. He must care for her. The caress meant he was beginning to love her.

From that moment every throb of her passionate, ardent little heart was his for the asking. She would no longer be jealous of the auburn-haired woman. She would make good, and he would love her because she had.

Brewster's triumph was complete, but it had no savor. To his utter amazement he found the warm little body floating so lightly in his arms of a great deal more interest than the by-play between Lola Bancroft and her escort.

"Great Scott," he ejaculated mentally, "I don't really give a hang about Lola. She hurt my pride, and that's all she hurt. I swear I don't believe I was ever in love with her. Just infatuated—that was all."

Once more his cheek touched Francine's soft perfumed one, and the contact thrilled him.

He nodded at Lola with cool complacency as he passed her again.

"That was Miss Bancroft, wasn't it?" Francine asked timidly when they returned to their table.

"Yes, child." He laughed. "I've just discovered a most astounding thing. A week ago I thought she was the most beautiful creature God ever made; that she held my happiness in

her pink palms and that the light of my life would die if I lost her. And now—"

The bright color all faded from Francine's cheeks. She suddenly felt cold and weary. "And now?"

"I find there are others quite as beautiful. That I am entirely happy with you, and the sun still shines though she loves some one else."

"Oh!" gasped Francine and knocked over her glass of water.

THAT Monday morning as she tripped along Forty-Fifth Street on her way to rehearsals, Francine's feelings were a strange combination of nervousness, happiness, exultation and a premonition of evil. A letter from her mother had informed her that Horace Lockridge was in New York, but she never expected to see him standing at the stage entrance.

Francine had never liked the man, but at that moment she was delighted to see him. He could give her news of her dear ones. She offered her hand with a cordial "Hello, Horace! My but it's nice to see you!"

"Thought you might be glad to see me," said the actor, his ruddy cheeks growing redder. Then glancing over his shoulder, he asked: "How's tricks, Francine? Have they tumbled to the masquerade yet?"

"No," she answered. "But you mustn't speak of it, nor call me Francine. Some one might hear you."

"You won't forget when you're the bee's knees on the big street that you owe it to me, will you? I put the folks up to the idea."

"Yes. Yes, I know," she stammered uneasily. Something in his manner was menacing, though he smiled. She wanted to get away from him before any one saw her. "I must go in now, Horace. I mustn't be late for my first rehearsal. Call me up, won't you? I'm stopping at the Astor Hotel."

"Ye-eh?" His light eyes swept over her Krimmer coat and her smart shoes. "Stepping high, aren't you? Say, do you know if the cast is filled?"

"No—no, I don't know."

"Well, put in a word for me, will you? Understudy or anything, I don't mind."

"Yes, I will." She edged into the doorway.

"Wait a minute." He detained her. "S'pose you have lunch with me. I'm just around the corner at the Buckler, and you can come there after rehearsal is over."

"We may not stop for lunch," she interrupted.

"Sure you will. You better do it, Francine. I've got something mighty important to tell you."

"I will if I can, but I won't promise."

At that moment, Brewster, brief case in hand, entered the alleyway. Francine's cheeks flamed scarlet when she saw him. With a hasty good-by to Horace, she darted through the stage door, but not before Brewster had seen her talking with the loudly-dressed stranger.

The two men stared at each other. Brewster scowled. He'd have to tell Vera to be careful of her associates, or she would be gossiped about. A woman in the public eye couldn't be too careful of her reputation. Not if she was to be his star.

And because he wanted to talk to her on this subject, he called her aside before starting rehearsals and asked her to have lunch with him.

Instantly Francine forgot Horace Lockridge and his half-veiled threat.

The knowledge that at one o'clock she would sit opposite the man she loved, robbed that first rehearsal of a great deal of its terrors.

Most of the cast had worked for Brewster before and they resented the newcomer. They were seasoned actresses and actors. They saw in Francine a mere nobody about to be elevated to stardom. Lola Bancroft had not hesitated to spread rumors as to why her contract had been canceled, and they had been embellished. Brewster had chosen the worst actress he could find to take her place. He was going to star her just to humiliate Lola. And so on.

To be sure, Francine showed no great histrionic ability that morning, but her winsome charm, her soft, melodious voice, and her obvious desire to please, soon won her friends. Brewster, who was prepared to find her "rotten," beamed happily. The child might not be a good actress, but she was a long way from bad. A few weeks under his direction, and not even Lola could do more with the part.

BOTH had forgotten Horace when they crossed to the Astor Grill for a bite of luncheon. Francine's eyes were sparkling, her cheeks like the petals of a pink rose. Though Brewster had not told her he was pleased with her, she felt intuitively that he was.

"You—you think I'll do?" she asked timidly after he had given their order.

"You'll have to work," he said, "work very hard, but I believe you can play the part."

"Oh, I'll work," she answered. "I want to make good more than anything in the world so that—" She paused, her face crimson.

"So what?"

"Nothing." She crumbled a bit of roll.

The rehearsals progressed slowly, tediously, but without the usual bickerings and arguments between author, director and producer, since Sydney Brewster combined all three. Twice during the first week Horace Lockridge telephoned Francine and insisted that she have dinner or lunch with him, but the girl pleaded no time.

She was studying very hard, always tired at night, and Brewster had fallen into the habit of taking her to luncheon and dinner every day. He thought he did so to help her with her part, but as a matter of fact, he forgot the actress in the girl when he was alone with her. Sometimes he felt like laughing when he realized that he had engaged her in the first place to humiliate Lola. Now Lola was as some one who never existed.

Of course there was comment in the company about his attentions to Francine. Several times after returning from a scene the girl had interrupted a whispered conversation in the wings; but it never occurred to her that they were discussing her until one morning she overheard a few words that sent all her day dreams into chaos.

"You know he's only keeping her to get even with Bancroft. It wouldn't surprise me if she got her notice any day and Bancroft came back to open in the part," said the character woman. "Bancroft has split with Norman Keith. Keith caused the trouble between her and Brewster. With that affair over, Brewster is pretty certain to take her back, he's that crazy about her. It's too bad, for little Farley is sweet, but of course Bancroft—"

"Shssh!" warned the heavy man, but too late.

Francine's face went dead white. At that bitter moment the part and the loss of it meant nothing to her; it was the fact that Brewster still loved Lola Bancroft and wanted her back.

Somehow she managed to walk away without giving any sign of having overheard the gossip. Somehow, she stumbled through the rest of the rehearsal. Only Brewster, whose eyes never left her face when she was on the stage, realized something was wrong.

He saw her start to leave the theater without him when rehearsal was over, and not waiting to get his hat or overcoat, he ran out into the alleyway after her.

"Vera!" he called. "Vera! Wait for me!"

SHE walked faster. He caught up with her and took her arm. She tried to avoid looking at him, but he saw the tears on her cheeks and her pitifully quivering mouth.

"Why, child!" he exclaimed. "What's happened? Why are you crying?"

She did not answer at once. Great sobs tore at her throat. She wished the earth would open and swallow her. His fingers pressing into her arm felt like fire. She struggled to draw away from him, but he pulled her gently back into the theater. And there in the semi-darkness, the man folded her in his arms.

"Now, what is it, honey?" he demanded. "Who has hurt you?"

Stammering, too utterly miserable to use subterfuge, Francine told him what she had overheard.

"And you were crying because you thought I was going to take the part away from you?" He held her at arms' length and studied her face.

"No, because—you loved Lola Bancroft so that you would—"

She never finished the sentence. With a laugh of absolute content he folded her in his arms again while his lips found hers and held them.

"You blessed precious! Didn't I tell you ages ago I no longer loved Lola? I don't love any one in the world but you, dearest. I don't think I ever loved any one but you. And I've a pretty good idea I fell in love with you the day you walked into my office in that outlandish costume of yours. I admit I sent for you in the first place to get even with Lola—a caddish thing to do as I look back at it, and a thing that proves I never loved her or I wouldn't have wanted revenge. Nothing you could ever do would make me seek revenge on you. Blessed, blessed baby, are you satisfied now?"

"I love you," she said simply. "I love you better'n all the world, and when I thought you were just using me, I wanted to die."

"And that's what I intended to do," he said contritely, "when I was so dumb as to think I cared for Lola. I'll tell you all about it some day. But we mustn't think of her now, or what I had intended to do. I love you—I shall love you as long as I live and that's what counts, isn't it?"

"Uh-uh," she murmured happily from the depths of his coat collar. "And I'm going to be a good actress for your sake."

"You're going to make jaded old Broadway sit up and take notice, darling. And after the opening, when the critics have all had their say, you and I are going to steal down town to City Hall and have a little ceremony performed that will make us man and wife."

"Oh, Mr. Brewster!" she gasped.

"Sydney, sweetheart."

"Sydney."

A discreet cough in the doorway made them break apart in confusion. Silhouetted against the light from outside stood Lola, luxurious in Siberian squirrel and crimson velvet. She advanced slowly on to the darkened stage, illuminated only by a stand lamp near the footlights.

"I'm sorry to interrupt a most interesting *tête-à-tête*," she drawled, "but I wasn't aware that rehearsals were over, and I wanted to see a bit of them."

"The cast is dismissed for luncheon." Brewster answered coldly. He still held Francine's hand.

"If you don't mind I'll wait." Lola drew a chair from the side wall and seated herself. "I've been wanting an opportunity for a chat with you anyway, Syd."

The young producer bent swiftly and kissed Francine's forehead. "You'll have to make it snappy then," he addressed the auburn-haired woman, "as my time is precious. Run along, sweetheart. I'll do without lunch to-day."

Francine fastened her coat and walked out of the theater. She heard the other woman's sarcastic laugh follow her and her remark: "She seems to have taken my place in more ways than one, Syd."

But Brewster's reply banished any hurt that Lola had intended: "I'm going to marry Miss Farley, Lola. What is it you want to see me about?"

FRANCINE walked briskly to the corner. In spite of the ill-timed interruption, in spite of Lola's jeering laughter, Francine was happier than she had ever been in her life. Brewster loved her, and they were to be married! Never in all the dreams she had woven about him had she dared hope that her love would culminate in marriage.

What did it matter if he had cared for Lola Bancroft once, or that he had engaged *her* in a spirit of revenge? He was her lover now, and soon would be her husband. She forgot all about her own deception, that the man to whom she was going to give her fresh young life thought she was some one else.

As she started across Broadway, feeling that she would rather lie down in her room for a few moments than have anything to eat, she heard some one call: "Miss Farley!"

She turned and saw Horace Lockridge separate himself from a group of loungers near the New York Theater. She had completely forgotten that he was in town. His presence brought back forcibly to her that she was in masquerade. She would rather have hurried on, but he came toward her quickly and linked his arm in hers.

"Thought you were going to have lunch with me some day," he said reproachfully.

"I didn't promise—then, I've been very busy."

"Not getting high hat, are you?"

"Oh, no. Of course not." With a little feeling of distaste she noticed that his shoes needed a polish, and that he was not shaved. "But you see this means so awfully much to me, and Broadway is very new."

"I'll say it is. Where you going now?"

"To the Astor."

"All right. We'll have a cup of coffee together, unless you're too up-stage to be seen with me."

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way," she flared.

He led her across the street and into the hotel lobby. Neither saw Lola, who, cheeks burning with chagrin, emerged from the theater a few seconds after Francine and followed her.

"I've been wanting to talk to you ever since I hit town," Horace said. "I told you I had something of importance to tell you, but I guess you've been so busy trotting around with the manager Adonis you have no time for old friends. But you've got to hear what I have to say before you open, or there may be trouble."

"Trouble?" Francine looked startled. "What do you mean?"

"Just that. Come on, we'll go downstairs to the grill. You'll get served quicker."

Again the premonition of evil swept over Francine. There was a veiled threat in Lockridge's manner that kept her from refusing to accompany him.

LOLA, in the doorway, saw them descend the stairs. A malicious smile twisted her red lips. So that little upstart from the rep show that Brewster was going to marry was not playing on the level either! What a joke on his royal highness! He'd suffer for i n s u l t i n g *her!* Practically throwing her out of the theater. "I love Vera Farley, and I never really loved you!"

Lola laughed softly, then with a toss of her arrogant head she descended the stairs. She waited until Francine and the actor had found a table, then entered the grill room and asked to be given a table just behind them.

She had only a vague idea what she intended to do. Certainly she never expected to overhear what she did. She was aflame with indignation, jealousy and bitterness, and ready to do anything that would oust the girl who had supplanted her. If it was the last thing she accomplished on this earth, she was going to play *Lotus* in "Ashes" the opening night! To do so she had thrown over the man she loved and had gone to the theater ready to fling herself in Brewster's arms, marry him if necessary; and now—

She slipped into a chair and ordered coffee without being seen by Francine, who was too upset by Horace Lockridge's attitude to look about her.

"What do you mean about trouble?" Francine asked.

Horace leaned across the table. "Well, it's this way. If I wasn't dead certain the papers would get hold of it, I would have kept my mouth shut, but once your name gets blazoned around they are going to print everything they can find out about Vera Farley, and—"

"What of it? Vera never did anything she was ashamed of," Francine interrupted indignantly.

"No? Well, you don't know everything Vera did. I don't say it's anything to be ashamed of, only she never published the fact, and neither did I."

"Will you tell me what you're driving at?" Francine said with white lips.

"You remember when Vera was in New York last summer?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I was here at the same time. And one day Vera and I stole over to Newark and got married."

"I don't believe you!"

"It happens I can prove we did. I have the marriage certificate. She didn't want it, and—"

"I don't believe you," the girl repeated. "Vera would have told us if she had done such a thing. You never acted at all like man and wife, and—"

"You forget your folks never liked me. When we got married Vera had no intention of returning to the rep show. When she couldn't make the grade here she had to go back, and I went with her. We were going to cut it again next year, but—"

"What if Vera did marry you?" Francine said, her heart sinking as it became forced upon her that the man was speaking the truth. "That has nothing to do with me."

The woman at the table behind them strained her ears in amazement. Unquestionably the girl was Vera Farley, yet she was speaking as if Vera Farley were some one else. What did it mean?

"Hasn't it?" There was triumph in Horace's low tones. "You forget *you* are Vera Farley now, my dear. When the newspaper reporters begin to dig up your past they will find a record of that marriage in Newark. Then there will be a romantic story blazoned about you, and—"

"Well, what of that?" Francine's face was ashen now. Suppose the story did come out just as she had promised to become Brewster's wife? She had never liked Horace, but as he sat there facing her, his red face bloated with dissipation, the day's growth of beard on his cheeks, his loose pendulous lips wreathed in an insinuating smile, Francine loathed him. The thought that Brewster might hear she had ever married this person made her positively ill. How could Vera have done such a thing?

SUDDENLY she knew Horace had come to New York just to tell her this; that he had put the idea of the masquerade into Pa's mind for some ulterior purpose of his own.

"I don't see how any one is going to find out about the marriage," she said calmly. "I am not of enough importance for them to go looking through marriage licenses to see if I have a husband. No one need know about it—unless you tell them."

He coughed. "Well, you see you are using Vera's name, aren't you? If Vera had lived I would have shared in her success. You're getting it all, and I think I've got a little right to cut in on it. Think it over, my dear.

"You mean you want me to pay you money to keep still?" Francine's voice was icy with scorn.

"I asked you to speak a word for me to Brewster, but evidently you didn't want me in the company," he answered.

"The cast was full."

"Your pull with Brewster would have got some one fired if you had asked him to do it. Since you didn't—I've got to live, haven't I?"

"On a woman's money?"

He laughed. "I think that woman owes a lot to me. I don't want to hurt you, Francine, get that straight. But I admit I saw my palms being pretty well greased when I showed the old folks a way out of their difficulty. Get me a part in Brewster's show or I guess it's come across with some coin—or—"

"The story of Vera's marriage to you in the newspapers?" she finished for him.

He nodded. "And it wouldn't be a romantic story either. Actress becomes famous and discards poor unknown husband. Think it over, Francine."

"I will," Francine answered. "I may tell Brewster the entire truth."

"You mean just who you are?"

"Yes."

"You'd be crazy to do it. You'd get your own walking papers and no mis-

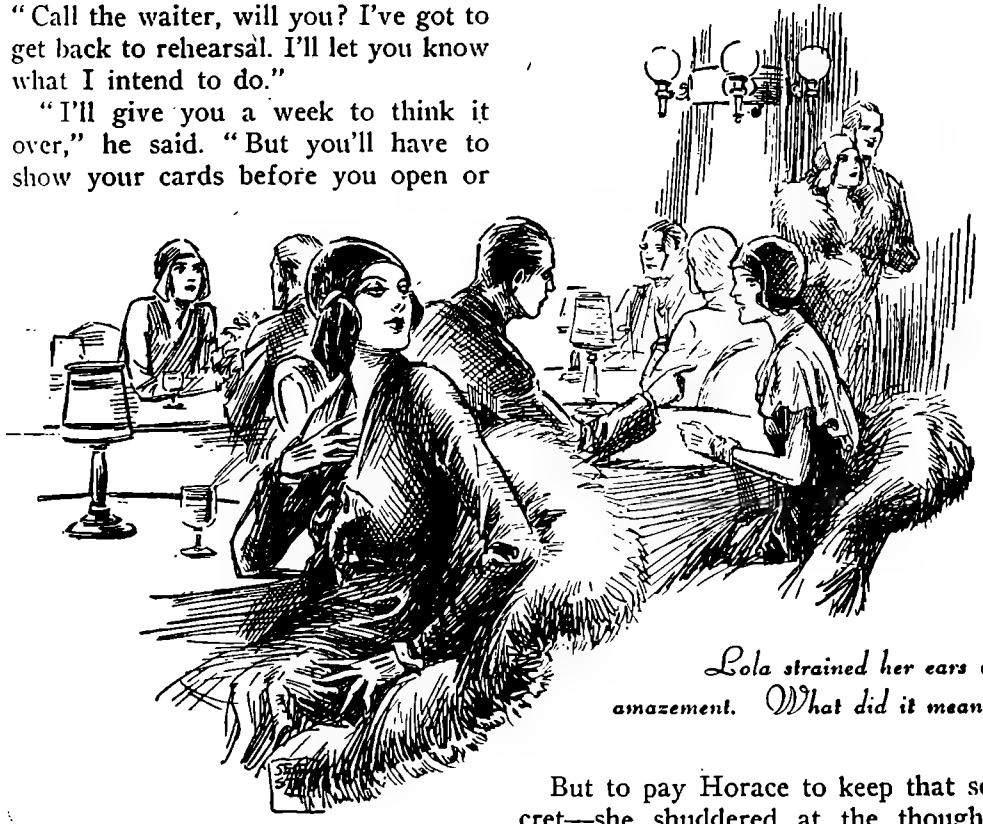
take." He laughed again. "Your contract with him wouldn't be worth the paper it was written on."

Francine remained silent in bitter thought. When she did speak she said: "Call the waiter, will you? I've got to get back to rehearsal. I'll let you know what I intend to do."

"I'll give you a week to think it over," he said. "But you'll have to show your cards before you open or the story will be in the newspaper offices before you open."

Francine nodded. She drew on her coat and, without speaking to him again, left the restaurant. She would have to have advice from some one. But from whom?

Above everything, she didn't want Pa and Ma to know that their favorite child had married secretly a man they despised. She felt certain that if she told Brewster the truth he would turn against her, not because she was not Vera Farley, but because she had deceived him, had stolen a name and a position that did not belong to her. He loved her—oh, she was positive of his love, but one woman had deceived him—he would never be able to forgive another.



Lola strained her ears in amazement. What did it mean?

But to pay Horace to keep that secret—she shuddered at the thought. Always to be in his toils—knowing now the manner of man he was.

All the bright sunshine had vanished. She seemed to be walking in a thick fog, a fog that grew thicker and more smothering as she neared the theater. She would see Sydney there. He would expect her to be bright and happy in their newly discovered love.

What could she do?

LOLA rose unsteadily from the table and went outside. Never in her whole life had she felt so exultant. Piecing all the conversation together she came to the decision that

the girl Sydney Brewster loved was masquerading under a name which did not belong to her, and that the real Vera Farley was married to the shabby stranger she had seen at the table, a man not above blackmail.

What the girl's real name was, was of small importance, since she had evidently more than made good with Brewster. But it would be of vast importance if Lola could convince Brewster that his new star, the girl he expected to marry, was already the wife of another man.

She wished she knew who the other man was. Brewster would have to have convincing proofs before he would believe anything she said about Francine. And she would have to hurry. Something told her that Brewster's new star would not pay blackmail. Lola would have to destroy any chance for confession before the opening of "Ashes." There was still a week until that night.

She walked quickly to the subway, determined to go to Newark and find the records of the marriage.

IT was after eleven o'clock when Sydney Brewster reached his apartment on lower Park Avenue. He had had a most disappointing evening. He had dined with Francine and had found her distrait and obviously unhappy, though she had striven to hide her feelings. When at length she had pleaded a headache he had sent her home and gone to his club.

He himself had been full of plans for their future together, and had wanted to talk about their marriage, but the girl had seemed so uninterested he had said little.

Brewster let himself into his apartment and turned on the light. He had a Jap who cared for it, but who did not sleep there. So he was considerably surprised when Saki emerged from the shadows down the corridor.

"Lady call," the servant whispered. "She say she no go till she see you. I no go till you come."

Brewster muttered impatiently and pushed open his living room door. Lola lay in languid repose on the divan. She sat up at his entrance and faced him.

"I knew you'd refuse to see me if I telephoned," she said insolently, "but as I have your interests at heart I risked your displeasure and my reputation and came anyway."

"Yes?" He stared at her coldly. "We'll dispense with your heart and my interests, Lola. I think I made it plain to you to-day that everything is definitely over between us."

"You made that plain enough, surely, and you hurt me terribly, Syd, but I can forgive you when I know how I am going to hurt you."

"I don't think you can hurt me," he answered incredulously.

"Not because I want to—Syd." She rose and, crossing to him, caressed his arm. "What do you know about that kid who has taken my place?"

"I love her and am going to marry her."

"You may love her, old dear, but you'll never marry her. It happens she is already married."

"Wha-at!" His laughter was genuine this time.

"Don't laugh!" she snapped. "I'm telling you the truth. She was married last summer to an actor by the name of Horace Lockridge. He used to work in her father's rep show. They were married in Newark while they both were on here. I overheard them talking about it in a restaurant to-day, and I later made it my business to find out all the details."

"I don't believe you," he said slowly, but his face had become gray and hard. "That child married! I feel like a cradle-snatcher myself in taking her. Why she's never been in New York before or—"

"So she *says*. Don't take my word for it. Go over to Newark and look through the records. That's all, Syd. If you want me, you know where to find me."

The man stood as though graven in stone while she lifted her coat and wrapped it about her. He did not move when she swept out of the room. But as the door of the apartment clicked behind her he sank into a chair and clenched his hands with a groan.

Suppose what she said was true! Suppose he had been deceived in Vera as he had been in Lola!

No! The two girls were as different as the poles. Vera was incapable of such deception. He wouldn't insult her with questions, but— He had to ease his mind. If Lola Bancroft were telling malicious lies he'd break her if it was the last thing he did.

He crossed to the telephone and got his stage manager on the wire.

"I've got to leave town in the morning, Mac. You take the rehearsal," he said.

All that night, while Francine tossed restlessly on her bed striving in vain to sleep, Brewster paced the floor, arguing with himself that he was a cad to listen to anything Lola Bancroft had said and hoping against hope the records in Newark would prove that she lied.

FRANCINE went to rehearsal the next morning with the decision to tell her lover the truth. If he took the part away from her, if he turned from her, at least her conscience would be clear. She had magnified her deception until she felt as though she were a criminal. Hope was dead in her. But one thing she could do—spare her parents the knowledge of Vera's marriage to Lockridge.

Relief swept over her when she discovered Brewster had relinquished the stage to MacDonald that day. It gave her a few hours' respite, gave her time to think of a way to word her story. But when afternoon came and no Brewster appeared she began to worry.

What was detaining him at this time? Dress rehearsals would begin in a couple of days. Francine knew how important they were. In her anxiety for the play's success she almost forgot her own dilemma.

And while the rehearsal was in progress Brewster had verified the truth of Lola's statement. The damning record of Vera Farley's marriage to Horace Lockridge was a blow that sent him staggering into the open, caring little whether his play was a success or failure. One thing only gave him a slight ray of hope. The records had given Vera's age as twenty. His Vera could not be twenty-one. He was positive of that. Women may look younger than their years, but his Vera was a child in years. There was a mistake somewhere.

His thoughts were in a turmoil. If the girl he loved and had asked to become his wife was already married she would be ready for lies and subterfuges if he confronted her. She might be divorced, but if that were so a great deal of the bloom and charm that had been her attraction was gone. If there was a terrible mistake some place, to question her would be an insult that would destroy their love.

He wandered about the streets puzzling, weighing, pondering what to

do and did not go near the theater that day.

WHEN Brewster did not appear for rehearsals the second day Francine was in torment. She wandered through her scenes in so absent-minded a fashion that the members of the company began to shake their heads and predict failure. Even MacDonald, the stage manager, who knew the state of his employer's feelings where the girl was concerned, felt called upon to reprimand her.

She went to her hotel in tears, praying that her lover had telephoned her and given some reason for his absence and silence. But there was no message.

Three days went by. MacDonald knew where Brewster was, but no one else did. Francine was certain now he had learned something, and she went about in a half dazed condition.

The first dress rehearsal was called for Sunday at the theater where "Ashes" was to open after a week's tryout out of town. Weary and heartsick, with none of the thrill that should accompany such an occasion, Francine made up and got into her first act gown. Just before her first entrance a telegram arrived and was handed to her.

With trembling hands she tore open the yellow slip. She read:

> Good luck. Put it over big.
> SYDNEY.

It came from Philadelphia. In a measure the message buoyed up her sinking spirits, but it was so cold, so formal, she felt chilled also.

Francine scarcely knew how she got through that dress rehearsal. She was aware of a sea of faces in the auditorium, of a certain amount of applause, and that members of the company came one by one to her dressing room to congratulate her upon her success, but success was without savor. Something had happened to ruin her happiness, something had come between her and the man she loved and nothing would ever matter again.

She was too hurt, too proud to ask the stage manager where the producer was. She believed Brewster had learned of her deception and was going to let her continue in the rôle, but was finished with her as a woman.

She started to leave the theater and came face to face with Lola Bancroft. The auburn-haired woman was smiling, but it was a twisted smile that held little joy. She had managed to witness the rehearsal, but she had failed to secure the part she wanted. She offered Francine her gloved hand and murmured: "You did splendidly, my dear, splendidly."

Francine thanked her and tried to move on, but the other detained her. "I hope you realize what a brick Syd Brewster is," she said in a tense whisper. "He knows all about your marriage and yet he hasn't thrown you out of the cast."

Before Francine could answer she brushed by her and into the theater.

SO Horace Lockridge had not waited to see what she was going to do, he had already gone to Brewster with his story and left her in a position where she could neither deny nor affirm the truth of the marriage! Such were Francine's thoughts as she paced the floor of her bedroom that night.

If only she could see the man she loved—tell him who she was and that never in her whole life had she cared for any one but him, let alone become the wife of another. But she had no

idea where he was nor how to reach him.

Once she paused at the telephone. She would call up Horace and ask him what he had said. Then she hesitated. The harm had been done. What use to talk to him?

It was daylight when, fully clothed, she flung herself across her bed and fell into a restless slumber. A slumber that was disturbed three hours later by the telephone operator informing her it was nine o'clock.

She had to catch a train at ten o'clock. The second dress rehearsal was to take place in Atlantic City, where they were to open on Tuesday night. Francine redressed quickly, bathed her face and combed her hair.

Something of her father's teachings came to her. The show must go on. Her world might crumble about her, but so long as her services were needed she must be there to give them. Unquestionably she would get her notice after the first performance, but she must play that performance.

During some of the journey she slept. Part of the time she thought about her parents, all that her failure would mean to them. Since she had arrived in New York she had written them many glowing letters of her success, of what their future together would be. They were planning to come to the city as soon as "Ashes" had settled into a run. Now all that would be over.

She would have to return to the rep show, just as Vera had done, with the knowledge that not only had she failed to make good, but that she had lost her lover. Her heart felt very black.

Had she been older she would have had a more cheerful outlook, she would have reasoned that Brewster was not the only producer, and that even if he pushed her aside because of deception, others might not do so. But Francine was very young and terribly in love.

The train pulled into the station. She rose wearily and followed the other passengers out of the car. Suddenly she felt faint.

She saw Brewster standing on the platform. For a moment she had an urge to flee before he saw her; the next moment she decided to make her confession then and there. With her face very pale, a pitiful smile on her lips she advanced toward him.

His eyes were grave as he took her hand. She started to speak, but his expression rendered her voiceless. He led her to a taxi, helped her into it, then seated himself beside her.

"Sydney," she stammered at length, "you—you—saw Horace—Lockridge, didn't you?"

He shook his head. "No. I never saw him."

"But—then why—why have you kept away from me? She—Lola Bancroft said you knew all about the marriage?"

"Yes. I know all about the marriage."

"Sydney!" Her little hot hands clasped one of his. "Sydney, I never was married to any one in my whole life! I swear it. I never loved anybody or kissed any man but you, but I've been very wicked and deceived you and—"

"Wait," he said in the same voice. "Don't tell me anything yet."

She sank back chilled and quivering. The cab cut through a side street and came to an abrupt stop before the stage entrance of the theater where "Ashes" was to open.

"Get out," Sydney said. "I want to show you something."

Wondering, she did as he requested. He helped her up a flight of stairs to the Boardwalk and around to the lobby. "Look," he said, pointing to an electric sign over the door.

Francine looked. She gasped, she choked, then suddenly she burst into tears.

The lettering was

FRANCINE FARLEY IN ASHES!

"How did you know? How did you know?" she sobbed when once more they were in the taxi and she was cuddled close in Brewster's arms.

"Blessed infant," he whispered. "I made it my business to find out. After Lola told me about the wedding I looked up the records. The age set me thinking. You had always seemed younger to me than the girl I had seen at Steubenville. Too innocent ever to have been a wife, certainly. And I loved you too much to believe you could deceive me. I simply hopped a train and went on to see your parents. They told me the truth. That's all."

"I've been so miserable," she said, "I thought you'd never forgive me—if you learned that I had deceived you by stealing Vera's name."

"What's a name? Now dry your eyes. I've another surprise for you."

"Not—" Her eyes sparkled.

"Sure, the whole Farley family is at the hotel. Don't you suppose I want them here to witness your triumph tonight?"

"Oh, Syd!" Arms about his neck she crushed her lips against his. "Oh, dear," she said a minute later. "Suppose—suppose I'm rotten?"

"If you are—I'll give you your notice and engage Lola Bancroft!" he laughed.

"If you do," she retorted, "I'll marry Horace Lockridge."

Then he said seriously: "Darling, you're going to be great for me, but actress or not you're my girl, and that's what counts."

Transformation

I CAUGHT the sunbeams in a chain,
The dawn clouds in a veil,
I made a carpet of the plain,
And for a Holy Grail
I raised a river, banks above,
And in it quaffed a toast to Love.

I taught the winds a bridal march,
And bound the hurricane
To ring its bells, 'neath heaven's arch,
A far flung wedding strain.
Since man, an earthbound, tottering clod,
Transformed by love, becomes a god!

—*Rena S. Travais.*

"You will both get your wishes—and you'll find they're the same!"

Mystery Girl

Almond eyes and the glitter o' gold led her to forbidden depths of Chinatown where evil awaited her. But she did not go alone!

By Doris Knight Jessee

Author of "Bride of the Dragon," etc.

"GOSH, you're a peach!" his black eyes told her admiringly.

"You're awfully good-looking yourself!" retorted her brown ones.

"I wish I knew you! Darn convention!" his glance went on.

"I'm sorry. I'd love to know you, too. But—of course you know it can't be done. We're just—strangers." Her eyes looked sad.

They were standing by one of the big round pillars in the St. Francis lobby, waiting for the busy desk clerks to accommodate the sudden influx of guests from the long transcontinental train which had arrived a short half hour before.

Chance had put her luggage next to his in the long row of suitcases and bags lined in front of the desk. Her gray hat-box and clever gray suitcase, both a little too new for absolute

smartness, leaned next to his battered cowhide hand bag and the gladstone plastered with South American labels. Somehow she liked to see them together like that—

Jane Josselyn had seen him when she boarded the train at Grand Central Station, New York. It had been just a brief glimpse, and he hadn't noticed her at all. But somehow her heart had pounded faster and her breath caught in her throat.

She had hoped he would be in the same car, but he wasn't. She hadn't even glimpsed him in the diner. But she had caught sight of his tall, lean figure when they changed cars at Chicago, and again came that odd feeling of breathlessness.

In all her twenty years Jane had never felt like that before. Not that she hadn't been in love. She had fancied herself in love many times. But this was different. Deeper, somehow. Idiotic, to feel like that about a man who hadn't even seen that she was alive!

BUT he saw she was alive now. His face had lighted up when he first saw her, as if he were greeting an old friend. Then his bronzed cheeks showed a touch of red. He had realized that they were total strangers. For an instant, though, Jane had known that the same vivid flame of feeling had coursed through his veins as was making her heart thud like mad.

The crowd around the desk dwindled. Jane stepped forward. So did the tall young man.

"I want a room and bath," said Jane in her low, throaty voice that was so charming.

The clerk shook his head. "Not unless you have a reservation. We're full up."

"Oh!" Jane gave a little gasp. Her instructions were that she must stop at the St. Francis. That was where Mrs. Prentiss Harvard had told her to go.

The tall young man said briefly: "Give her the room that was reserved for Randall Fayne. I'll stop up the street."

But another clerk spoke up. "There's that cancellation that just came in, Jim. Why not give her that room?"

So the clerk thrust a pen into Jane's fingers and she registered. But before she turned to follow the bell hop carrying her luggage, she said: "That was —very kind of you, Mr. Fayne."

He didn't reply, just stared at her as if she were some sort of vision of loveliness. A warm tide of color swept across Jane's peachbloom cheeks. Hastily she hurried after the impatient bell hop.

When she was alone in her room she went to the window and drew aside the curtain. The room faced Union Square. She stared at the hurrying crowds below on the street. She looked at the green of the trees and grass in the park. But she wasn't really seeing anything but the compelling blackness of Randall Fayne's eyes, the squareness of his lean jaw, the sweetness of his mouth, the duskiness of his blue-black hair.

San Francisco—city of romance where anything might happen. Anything! Was it going to bring—love to her? She gasped at her own daring thought.

QUICKLY she crossed to the mirror and drew off the gray felt hat with the Paris label on the inside. A Paris label! She, Jane Josselyn, daughter of an up-State New York clergyman, wearing a hat with a Paris label! And a chic tweed coat

with a great collar and cuffs of thick fur—the perfect travel coat, becoming, warm, and luxurious. It seemed incredible that she should own such a coat. And besides that, the suitcase was filled with lovely dresses and the hand bag was crammed with dainty silken underwear.

The whole thing was like an incredible dream. The trip across the continent; this perfectly-appointed hotel room; this strange, fascinating city.

She gazed intently at her reflection. She couldn't help seeing that she was beautiful — amber-eyed, long-lashed, amber-haired, with a sweetly-curving mouth and a complexion like rose-leaves in the spring.

It was her looks which had won her a place as salesgirl in Mme. Olga's swanky little shop on Fifth Avenue. Sometimes she modeled the dresses for Mme. Olga's select clientele. More often she merely sold the frocks to the fussy ladies who were so hard to please.

Mrs. Prentiss Harvard was one of the most imperious of the customers who came to Mme. Olga's. With that name she should have been a veritable dowager. Instead, she was a queerly beautiful woman with oddly slanting eyes and cheekbones a trifle too prominent. Her skin was olive. Not a suntan, but an olive that went well with bizarre shades of mustard and warm vermilion. She talked with the ghost of an accent in her speech. Russian, she said she was. Jane sometimes wondered—

One day Mrs. Prentiss Harvard demanded that Jane have luncheon with her. She gave the command along with an order for six evening frocks of shimmering beauty. She seemed to have no idea that Jane would refuse, and indeed Jane was delighted to go. Mrs. Prentiss Harvard fascinated her.

When they were seated across from each other and the order had been given, Mrs. Harvard spoke in her high-pitched, yet sweet-timbred voice. "Do you like your job? No?"

"Why, I—" hesitated Jane, at loss for a reply.

"Would you leave this job and go across the continent to San Francisco for me? You would have beautiful clothes, a salary of a hundred and fifty dollars a month, and I would pay your hotel bill. Come, what do you say?"

"What—what for?" gasped Jane, now completely at sea. "I mean—what must I do to earn this sum?"

MRS. PRENTISS HARVARD narrowed her slanting eyes. "That is a secret," she said. "When you arrive in San Francisco, you shall know. There is plenty of time for that. Well—what is your answer? Will you go?"

"But I don't know— How can I tell? I—"

"Decide now," said Jane's hostess in a tone savoring of boredom. It was as if she said: "It makes no difference to me whether you go or not. I can get a million other girls who would jump at the chance."

Perhaps it was her offhand manner. Perhaps it was because there was an incurable longing for adventure in Jane's heart. Whatever the cause, Jane heard herself saying: "If you'll give me your word it's nothing wrong —like—like killing anybody or—or stealing or—or something like that—maybe—I'll go!"

"It is none of those things you have mentioned. Really, it is something almost trifling! But I'm not at liberty to tell you now."

The woman laid her hand bag on the table. Deliberately she snapped the

catch, while Jane looked on with fascinated eyes. Slim olive fingers with long fingernails, brilliantly red, drew out a sheaf of bills from the hand bag. "Here is five hundred dollars," she said, handing the money to Jane. "Buy yourself some clothes."

Jane took the bills mechanically. She was in a daze. At any moment she expected her little alarm clock to shrill the summons for her to wake up and go to the shop. She must be dreaming. This couldn't be real.

"And in this envelope is your railroad ticket and your Pullman reservation. You leave to-morrow evening."

So Mrs. Prentiss Harvard had been as sure as that!

"I will be at the station to see you off and you shall have another five hundred dollars for expenses. See that you buy plain but elegant frocks. About three will do, I should say. And a travel coat and a couple of hats. You can get them from madame at a discount, I dare say?" Jane nodded. "I shall send out your luggage so I shall be sure it is correct."

She rose. "I can't stop to eat lunch now, but you needn't hurry." She drew on her immaculate white kid gloves with little nervous flutterings of her hands. "And you must tell no one that you are going on a secret trip. You might let it be known that you will be my companion-secretary."

"Yes," promised Jane. The room seemed to be spinning about. She was clutching the money and the tickets till her fingers ached.

"You will stop at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. I will give you further orders there!"

That was the last Jane had seen of Mrs. Prentiss Harvard. At Grand Central there was no one to see her off, though Jane lingered until the very last minute. But when she reached her section in the Pullman, a red-cap was patiently waiting with a box of candy.

"Lady tole me gib you this," he said, and handed her the box. Jane gave him a dime and he went away. When she opened the box, there was an envelope on top, containing five one-hundred-dollar bills! What a strange person Mrs. Prentiss Harvard was!

JANE turned away from the mirror and began unpacking her dresses. There were five of them, instead of the three which her employer had suggested. All were good models with excellent lines. Mme. Olga had been generous in the matter of discounts. Jane had been two years in the shop and always had been very faithful.

She bathed and rested a little while, and then put on the prettiest dress of all—black satin with a rolling collar of vivid blue. There was an inset of the same vivid blue silk at the bottom of the skirt on either side, and a long girdle of blue which wrapped about her waist and fell to the hem of the skirt, ending in a black tassel shot with gold. A dream of a frock! And there was a hat of black to go with it. The sort of hat which brought out the full beauty of Jane's lovely face.

She took her coat over her arm and went down to the lobby. First she inquired for mail and was told there was none. That was rather disconcerting. She wondered what under heaven she was supposed to do next.

The lobby was warm and dimly lighted. Little groups of well dressed women came out of the Garden tea-room and lingered, chatting and smiling. Jane eyed them enviously. They were so assured, so exquisitely gowned

and furred and hatted! They acted as if they belonged, and she felt herself so much an outsider. An ache of loneliness was in her heart for New York. Her friends, her relatives, every one seemed so far away.

As she lingered in indecision, a Chinese man in American garb came up to the desk, and she distinctly heard him ask for her. She stared in surprise as the clerk nodded toward her. The Chinese came over. He looked not unlike a rather fat idol, incongruously dressed. He bowed ceremoniously.

"You are Miss Josselyn?"

Jane nodded.

"I have a ticket for you." He handed her a bit of cardboard. "It is for a ride through Chinatown this evening on the sightseeing bus. Mrs. Prentiss Harvard wishes you use this."

He bowed again, and before Jane could ask a single question he was across the lobby and had been swallowed up by the revolving door.

"I WONDER," said a voice almost at her elbow—"I wonder if you'd be so heavenly kind as to dine with me?"

Jane started nervously.

Randall Fayne stood there. His face was rather red and he looked decidedly ill at ease, but he was standing his ground none the less.

"I'm an engineer," he said. "A civil engineer. I build roads through swamps in Venezuela and survey mountains in Mexico. I know several people in San Francisco, any of whom would, I am sure, be glad to vouch for my e m i n e n t respectability!" The ghost of a smile hovered about the corners of his mouth.

"Oh!" said Jane. That didn't seem to be very conclusive, so Randall talked on:

"I caught a glimpse of you when you boarded the train at New York." (So he *had* seen her, after all, thought Jane exultantly.) "I haven't been able to get you out of my mind ever since. Won't you—please—have dinner with me? I'll promise to be, oh, just awfully good!"

All the time he spoke, Jane felt as if she were being whirled about wildly by a mad hurricane of feeling. Why had this man such power to stir her heart?

"I—I'd like to dine with you," she said faintly.

He smiled. "You don't know what a life-saver you are. I was as lonely as the dickens."

"So was I." She spoke before she thought.

"Honestly?"

"Honestly!"

They were both rather breathless, as though a miracle were happening to them. This must be love, thought Jane to herself. Real love. The kind that comes swift as summer lightning.

But of course it wasn't. How absurd! She didn't know this man at all. Probably by the time she had talked to him for a while the spell would vanish.

But it didn't. Over their dessert Jane found herself liking this stranger more than any one she had ever met in all her life. He was the composite of all her girlhood dreams of the Prince Charming who would one day come to storm her heart.

They had decided not to eat at the hotel. Instead, Randall had taken her to a place in Sutter Street called The Aladdin. It was a dimly lighted tearoom, richly hung with Oriental tapestries. Little Chinese girls waited upon them, mincing in and out with the big trays.

The food was excellent, but Jane hadn't an idea what she ate. The joy of meeting at last the man she had dreamed about was only transcended by the fact that he seemingly found as great a delight in meeting her!

THEY talked of everything under the sun. By the time the meal was ended, they were old and tried friends—instead of strangers who had just chanced to find each other.

"Fortune? Would you like me to tell your fortune? I'll tell you everything the future has in store for you." A girl paused at their table.

"Shall we?" Randall's eyes were shining.

Jane nodded.

"Turn your tea cup around three times and make a wish," directed the girl.

Jane's hand persisted in trembling as she obeyed.

The girl took the cup and peered at it with keen eyes. "Oh," she said. "You want to be careful—very, very careful! The tea leaves plainly show that evil influences are around you. Very close!"

She shifted the cup about and looked at it from another angle. "I see

"Look out!" shrilled Jane. But too late

threatened death. And great happiness. And danger. And the love which comes but once to each of us." She hesitated. "I think all this will come—to-night," she concluded.

Jane shivered a trifle. Quickly Randall put his hand over hers. "It's all nonsense," he said, with a dark look toward the girl.

A strong current seemed to leap from his hand to hers. Jane felt as if she were suffocating with the force of her feelings. She forgot the fortune and thought only of Randall.

"It's all right," she said. "Have her do yours."

With his left hand he twirled the cup about, still keeping his right tightly imprisoning Jane's fingers.

The fortune teller looked into his cup and chuckled.

"The young lady does not need to worry—with you about," she said. "You will look out for her and shield her from all danger. There is marriage, too, and great happiness in your cup."

"Marriage—soon?" he asked swiftly.

"Very soon." She got up and started to walk away. But over her shoulder she said: "Oh—you'll both get your wishes, and I think you'll find that they're the same!"

"What do you suppose she meant by that?" Jane asked shakily.

"I don't know. The only thing I'm sure of is that I am the happiest man in the world to-night. That much she told truly."

"Why are you so happy?" Jane was glad of the dim lights that hid the blush on her cheeks.

"Because I've met you! The girl of my dreams. Oh, I suppose you'll think I'm crazy—talking this way to you—a girl I've only known a few hours. But somehow it seems as if I've known you always. It's queer—"

"Maybe we have—known each other before—long ages ago." It seemed that way to Jane.

"When you were a princess and I was a slave?" He smiled at her. A loving sort of smile that warmed.

"Maybe." She was trembling oddly.

"You're sweet!" He almost whispered the words. "Awfully sweet. Just the sort of girl I've been waiting for—always. Don't let me frighten you away."

His eyes were intent on hers, holding her gaze; studying her face as if to impress it upon his memory.

"Why should you—frighten me?"

"Because I should wait before I tell

you these things. I shouldn't be—rushing matters. But you see, I've really fallen in love for the first time in my life. And I don't know just how—to act."

RANDALL wasn't smiling now. He was very grave. Jane's heart gave a great leap and then thudded so fast it seemingly shook her whole body. He was sincere.

"I—" she began.

Just then the little Chinese waitress came up.

"Excuse me," she said in her precise English. "My uncle he just came to the door and he said to give you this."

She slipped a bit of folded paper into Jane's hand.

Jolted abruptly back to the world of reality from the miraculous realm of love, Jane blinked incredulously.

"For me?" she asked.

"Yes. You." The girl went away.

"You don't mind if I read this? I can't imagine what it is." Jane could have thrown the bit of paper into the sea! It had destroyed the perfection of the moment which had been hers. It had kept Randall from saying what he had been going to. Had he been on the verge of asking her to marry him? Absurd! Impossible. And yet—

"Go ahead and read. I'm curious, too," he was saying.

Do not have such a good time with the dark-haired young man that you forget to take the sight-seeing bus from the hotel at eight! Do not become so intimate with the young man that you tell him your life's history or your secrets. Do not let him know that you are taking the sight-seeing bus by command. Let him think you have had a sudden whim to go to Chinatown. Be sure to bring your small gray hand bag with you.

The communication was unsigned. The words were written so close together that Jane had difficulty making them out. It took her quite a while to read the entire note. As she read, a cold hand of fear seemingly gripped her joyously throbbing heart, slowing its happy beat.

Everything suddenly became sinister, menacing. There must be spies watching her every move. Else how would they know she was here—and with a dark-haired escort? The note was curt and commanding. There were no softening words of courtesy. No "please" or "thank you." Orders. To be obeyed. What would happen if she did not obey? Jane didn't know; but neither did she care to find out.

Fear came. What was she supposed to do? What was Mrs. Prentiss Harvard going to demand, for the luxurious trip across the continent and the thousand dollars in cash, and the room at the hotel? Why had Jane done this foolish thing? She might have known there was something wrong about it. But her conscience had been lulled by the pretty clothes and the luxuries her poverty-stricken life had never known.

But maybe, after all, she was making a great deal out of nothing. Perhaps Mrs. Prentiss Harvard was one of those eccentric wealthy people who get a thrill out of playing Lady Bountiful in odd ways.

"What—what time is it?"

Randall looked at his watch. "Fifteen minutes of eight."

"Oh, then I must hurry." Jane got to her feet and drew her coat about her. Randall sprang to help. It was as if he infolded her with the warmth of his love, along with the coat. The touch of his hand on her shoulders made her long to throw herself in his

arms and beg him to take her away from Mrs. Prentiss Harvard.

But she did nothing of the kind. She knew that Randall must be curious about the note. However, there was nothing she could tell him. She had already said that she knew no one in town. How strange he must think it that she received a message from the uncle of a Chinese waitress!

"MUST you leave? I—I thought maybe we could have the whole evening together." His voice sounded worried. "Have I—frightened you away after all?"

Jane couldn't have him thinking that. She blurted out as much of the truth as she dared.

"It—it sounds silly, but I've always heard about San Francisco's Chinatown. So—so I bought a ticket to go on a sight-seeing bus. I must get back to the hotel immediately in order to catch that bus."

He laughed. "Those busses are great stuff! A lot of old ladies out from the Middle West for a big thrill climb aboard and the Chinese guide endeavors to see that they get all they're looking for. Of course the scene is set before they get there! The most placid game of mah jongg or fan-fan becomes a wild scene of carnage and bloodshed when the tourists arrive." A sudden thought struck him. "I say, if you're set on going to Chinatown, why not let me take you in a taxi? It would be lots nicer, and—"

But Jane was shaking her head. "No, that won't do. I have to—" She bit off the words. "I want the fun of going on the bus. It sounds delightful."

Randall paid their check and they walked down the narrow flight of steps to the street. As she passed a dark place on the stairs, Jane fancied that a cold finger was laid against her lips. She almost screamed aloud, but fought down her panic. Probably it was nerves, brought on by the strange note, and by her own perturbation of spirit.

She was glad when they gained the street, with its humdrum of passing pedestrians and motor cars whizzing by.

"Well, if you must go on a monkey wagon, as the children call them—I guess I'll have to go too!" His tone was humorously resigned. "I shall chew gum and eat peanuts, I warn you."

"Oh!" Jane's pulses leaped.

Then he wasn't going out of her life as suddenly as he had come! She had been afraid that he was going to vanish and she would never see him again.

"Do come!" she begged. "I—I'm a bit afraid to go by myself."

"It will be rather a lark!" He was warming to the idea. "Let's go! There's our chariot waiting in front of the hotel now."

"I have to run up to my room for a minute first. Tell the sight-seeing man I'll be back in a moment."

SHE hurried up to her room and hastily seized the hand bag. She felt awfully silly going out with it. Why under the sun did Mrs. Prentiss Harvard want her to carry the thing? But she must obey orders.

Pausing long enough to dab a bit of perfume on each pink ear and a trifle on her curving lips, she returned to the street.

Randall stared at the hand bag. "Going to spend the week-end in Chinatown?" he inquired as he helped her into the huge, lumbering bus.

"I hate to carry bundles." She had thought that up on her way down in

the elevator. "I want to buy some things, and I thought this would be handy for carrying them."

"Sensible girl," he approved. Jane felt like a liar and a cheat.

The bus started with a jerk.

"We are going along Geary Street, ladies and gentlemen," said the man with the megaphone. "Past historic Union Square. Past the heart of the shopping district. Now we turn left on Grant Avenue, also part of San Francisco's exclusive shopping district. Chinatown, oddly enough, is part of this street."

"Oh, look at those lovely shops," Jane said. "Aren't those Chinese embroideries adorable?"

"Adorable!" agreed Randall, but he wasn't looking at the shops. Instead, he was gazing straight at Jane's glowing face.

"We are now passing the outer fringe of Chinese stores preparatory to climbing the hill to the real center of Chinatown. Dupont Street. That is what you can read on the oil silk lanterns in front of Sing Fat's enormous emporium. That is the old name of Grant Avenue. The Chinese are a wily race. They know the value of historic names. This is our first stop, ladies and gentlemen, to enable you to see at close range the myriad beauties of Chinese goods. Show your tickets, please, as you get out."

"This *is* a lark," said Randall as they stepped to the pavement. "I'm glad you insisted on coming in a bus."

Jane winced.

As she surrendered her ticket, a skinny, parchment-faced Chinaman, loitering near by, turned and went into the store, just in front of Jane and Randall.

"Twenty minutes allowed!" bawled the guide after them.

Jane gasped as she looked about. "How can we see all these perfectly heavenly things in just twenty minutes?"

Randall laughed. "Don't get too excited," he said. "Remember, we're only four blocks from the St. Francis right now! Although our driver took us around several blocks to make us think we were getting a real ride! We can come again to-morrow, if we don't see everything to-night."

Jane thrilled to that. She loved the way he said "we." And he evidently intended to see her to-morrow. Oh, what a wonderful world!

"Do you like dishes? They've everything you can think of here—old Cantonese, thousand-faces, red-dragon, satsuma."

"How about embroideries—mandarin skirts and things like that?" asked Jane.

Before Randall could reply, one of the old ladies in the party went up to the hovering Chinese clerk.

"You mebbe so catchem embloideries?" she twittered. "Where can get?" She was evidently proud of her ability to speak pidgin English.

The clerk looked sadly at her.

"I'm sorry, madame, but I'm afraid you'll have to go upstairs for the embroideries. There is an elevator at the rear of the store, however, and I am quite sure you will find a man in attendance there."

Randall guffawed, quickly turning his laugh into a cough.

"But we've discovered where the embroideries are!" he said to Jane.

JANE found a purple mandarin coat that she adored. It was an ancient piece of silk richly trimmed with bands of beautifully-worked embroidery.

"Isn't this lovely?" she said longingly as she tried it on and paraded before the full-length mirror. "Some day I'm going to own a coat like this."

"Why not now?"

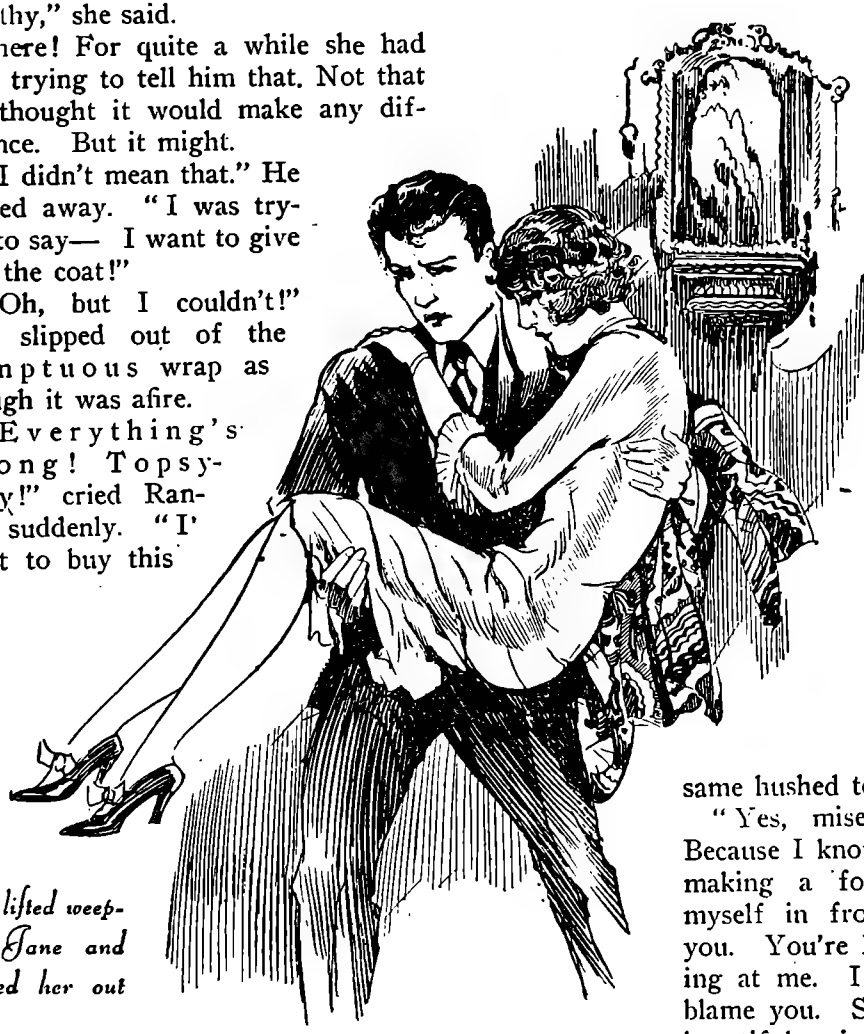
She tried to laugh. "I'm not—not wealthy," she said.

There! For quite a while she had been trying to tell him that. Not that she thought it would make any difference. But it might.

"I didn't mean that." He looked away. "I was trying to say— I want to give you the coat!"

"Oh, but I couldn't!" She slipped out of the sumptuous wrap as though it was afire.

"Everything's wrong! Topsy-turvy!" cried Randall suddenly. "I want to buy this for an engagement present."



He lifted weeping Jane and carried her out

"An engagement present?" repeated Jane in a very small voice. "Who—whose engagement?"

"Yours!" Randall's tone was dogged and his face was very red. "You don't know, of course, how crazy in love with you I am. Of course, you think I'm insane, to be talking this way to you. Perhaps I am—insane about you. But I can't help it. I don't want to help it. I've never been so happy—nor so miserable—in my life."

"Miserable?" asked Jane, still in the same hushed tone.

"Yes, miserable! Because I know I'm making a fool of myself in front of you. You're laughing at me. I don't blame you. Such a beautiful girl as you! A horde of men have fallen in love with you, of course. How presumptuous you must think me."

Jane put a shaking hand on his arm. "I'm not—laughing," she said tremulously. "See. I'm not."

She looked bravely up at him. Her eyes filmed with tears. What he saw in

her glance evidently told him how much she cared, for he seized her close in his arms and set his lips to hers in a kiss that made Jane's senses spin.

"My darling!" he whispered.

They clung to each other, oblivious of the clerk who had been waiting on them. He looked out the window, apparently oblivious of the lovers. Every one else had gone.

"I—I love you, too," whispered Jane.

"You—love me?" His voice was incredulous. "Oh, my dear, my dear!"

He held her so tight she could scarcely breathe. Again his lips sought hers in a kiss that seemingly held all the ecstasy of eternity.

"You will—marry me?"

Jane had ceased to think—to reason. She only felt. The one man in the world for her—and by some miracle he had fallen in love with her! "I'll—I'll marry you," she said and tried to smile.

"Jane—dearest!" Again she felt the wonder of his kiss.

SOME one coughed. Jane was rudely brought back to earth. The same parchment-faced Chinaman she had noticed when first they entered the store was standing before them.

"Your bus go!" he said mildly.

"Gone?" echoed Jane stupidly. "We haven't been here twenty minutes!"

"Yes. More than that."

Jane stared at him. His heavy-lidded eyes were mere slits of glittering blackness, hard as shoe buttons.

"I will take you to where bus is," he continued meekly. Only Jane caught the menace in those half-hidden eyes.

"Aw, we'll chuck the whole thing," said Randall largely. "We'll have a wonderful celebration all by ourselves, sweetheart. We—"

"But—I *want* to go around in the bus!" Jane was almost in tears. How horrible to have to obey the dictates of this horrible Chinaman—when she wanted, more than anything else on earth, to be alone with Randall. "Let's go with this man—Randy!"

He had told her that was his nickname. Now, hearing it from her lips, Randall threw aside his momentary depression. His face glowed, happily. "Just as you say, dear! But first—Here you!" The clerk approached. "We'll take this mandarin coat." He gave him the money.

It took a long time to wrap the coat, but their parchment-faced guide stayed almost immovable until the parcel was given to Jane. She thrust the coat into the gray hand bag, and Randall carried the bag in one hnd. The other was squeezing Jane's arm.

"This way," said their guide.

They strolled along the narrow street, with its brilliantly lighted stores, vivid with colorful silks and hangings, rich with teakwood furniture, beautifully carved; and with gorgeous cloisonné vases and bland-faced idols. Ordinarily, Jane would have been entranced. Now she hardly noticed, so filled with foreboding was she.

Where were they going? Did danger lurk ahead? Worst of all, was she menacing the life of the man she loved? Panic beset her. If anything happened to Randall— But what could she say to warn him? If he thought that trouble was near, he would rush straight for it. She was sure of that. She sighed.

"TIRED, dear?" Randall looked down at her in a protective way that made Jane want to kiss him.

She shook her head. "I—I was just

wondering if this is—is quite safe," she said uncertainly. "Maybe—we'd better—turn back?"

Randall laughed. "Safe as a church, Jane dear!" That was the first time he had used her first name. It gave her a comforting little thrill.

The guide was turning down a side street, then down an alley from there. They were away from the crowds on the street now, and the lights and the bustle and confusion. It was quiet in this dim alley. Awfully quiet. Jane was about to protest again, when she saw the big bulk of the sightseeing bus just ahead, taking up the whole street. Of course, everything was all right.

"Here," said their escort. He pushed open a door and they followed him into a dingy room. The paper was peeling from the walls. There was a musty smell in the air. A few dilapidated pieces of Grand Rapids furniture were set stiffly about, as if they were little used.

Their guide didn't pause there. Instead he went through another doorway into a room filled with steam from a huge washtub, over which an old Chinese woman was bending. A big stack of clothes was beside her, and she was flinging the washed garments over a three-legged chair. At their advent a startling number of cats—white cats, yellow cats, gray cats, black cats—big, little and medium-sized—scampered in all directions.

"Local color!" whispered Randall to Jane. "Pretty good, isn't it?"

She nodded, and clung to his arm. Her lips felt strangely stiff. She tried to tell herself that she wasn't frightened. But she was. Dreadfully.

The next room was absolutely empty. Dirt floor, musty-smelling. Lath walls from which the paper had long since departed. A cellar lizard, yellow and green and slimy, wriggled out of their way. Jane wanted to scream, but the sound stuck in her throat.

Into still another room they went, always going deeper into this mysterious tumbledown house. Evidently it was a narrow place, only one room wide. Each room was set in a straight line.

Jane shuddered when she thought how far they had come into this strange habitation. Why, they must be nearly in the center of the block. And how still everything was! Why didn't they hear the excited chatter of the tourists? She was just about to speak of this to Randall, when she gasped in wonder.

The last room was a sort of chapel, filled with wooden benches. The walls were hung with ancient pictures—unframed. Each picture was life-sized. On one was depicted a lovely lady of Chinese nobility. Another showed an emperor with his Nubian slave bowing before him. Next to that was a great coiled dragon behind a regal-looking Chinaman, who was interestedly watching the beheading of a slave.

"Done on parchment. Fascinating, aren't they?" said Randall, following the direction of her gaze.

BEFORE Jane could answer, an old, old man rose from one of the benches. He came forward uncertainly, and they could see that he was blind. He was clad in a long robe, made of some sleazy black material. His face was one mass of wrinkles, deep furrowed, so that his features were hardly distinguishable. On his chin was a scraggly white beard, sparse and funny. He looked as though he had been molting, Jane thought to herself, with a hysterical

desire to giggle. He put forth one long, skinny arm and grasped Jane's hand with skeleton-like fingers that had unexpected strength in their grasp.

She started nervously.

"You like me tell fortune?" the ancient Chinese demanded in a high, cracked singsong tone. "I old. Over hundred years. I tell fortune."

"I think we've had enough fortunes to-day," cut in Randall. He thrust the old man's hand away from Jane's flinching fingers. The Chinese turned and faced Randall.

"I priest!" he said in a tone of rebuke.

Jane said, "Let's go, Randy!"

The room was heavy with the odor of incense. Jane had the impression that hundreds, maybe thousands of joss sticks had been burned here in past years—and that every one of the incense sticks had left a perpetually lingering odor in the room. She began to feel as if she daren't draw too deep a breath.

There was a sort of temple at one end of the place, with a lot of red-lacquer-and-gold carving. Beside the temple were pasted many red papers and some of tarnished gold. They clung to the wall dejectedly like long since dead prayers that had been made in such a far-gone day that they no longer mattered. At the right of the temple was a small square door, incongruously painted a bright blue.

That door held Jane's gaze. Where did it lead, she wondered? And why, in such a dingy old place, was that so evidently newly painted? The bright blue enamel was garish in this atmosphere of long ago.

"Here," said Randall, thrusting a coin into the ancient priest's hand. He turned to the guide. "Too stuffy in here. We'll be getting out."

The parchment-faced Chinaman gave a soft hiss. Instantly the door through which they had entered swung to. There was a clicking sound, as of a bolt being shot home.

Randall's eyes narrowed. Jane was too frightened to scream. At the same moment the little blue door swung open, disclosing a long dark passage.

"Go!" commanded the Chinaman.

"Not by a jugful!" Randall turned to Jane. "Don't be afraid," he said. "We're in love! That 'll be our magic talisman against harm."

He hit the parchment-faced Chinaman a mighty blow, and the fellow crumpled to the floor.

"Look out!" shrilled Jane. But she was too late. The old priest had crept up behind Randall and thrown a bright bit of silk, snatched from the altar, over his head. Jane dashed to his rescue, but before she could tear the silk from over his eyes the room was filled with Chinese.

QUICKLY they bound Randall, hand and foot, and carried him through the blue door into the dark passageway.

"Randy!" screamed Jane. "Oh, Randy!"

She dashed after him. Two Chinese, implacable and unmoved, followed her. The door closed behind them.

The passageway was narrow. It was musty and smelled of earth and of foul air. It turned and twisted. Jane felt as if she were in some hideous nightmare from which she must presently wake to find herself safely home in bed.

"Randy!" she screamed again. She could hardly see, it was so dark.

Suddenly a light gleamed out. They came into a sumptuous room, richly hung with vari-colored drapes of satin

and silk. The furniture was all teakwood and there were beautiful vases set about in every conceivable spot.

"Oh!" cried Jane. She shrank back, overcome by horror.

Standing in the midst of the Chinese, dressed in a beautiful Chinese costume of Pekin-blue brocade, was—Mrs. Prentiss Harvard!

Only now, Jane knew why Mrs. Prentiss Harvard had puzzled her so. The woman was undoubtedly Chinese!

She glided forward.

"You have done very well, my child!" she said in her queer, high-pitched voice. "Not only have you brought the opium safely to San Francisco, but you have delivered to us the man who was detailed to follow you and discover us!" She shrugged. "Too bad we can't keep you and use you again! It is a great pity. But we must do away with you."

She smiled again, as if she were ordering tea at the Ritz.

"Randy!" Tears were streaming down Jane's cheeks.

Randy was lying on the floor. Some one had stuffed a gag into his mouth. His eyes were intent on Jane and she thought she detected contempt in their depths. He must think that she had decoyed him into this hideous den! The thought was like a tearing, searing pain. She tried to run to him, but before she had taken two steps, a couple of Chinese had pinioned her arms. They held her in a grip of steel though she struggled and fought like mad.

"A nice haul this time, papa!" Mrs. Prentiss Harvard was addressing the blind old man. So she was his daughter!

"Yes?" He rubbed his long, claw-like hands together. Jane felt sick at the pit of her stomach at the sight of his inch-long finger nails.

"Bring the hand bag!"

One of the Chinese knelt and slit the bag down the side. Before Jane's horrified eyes they drew out a false bottom, wherein was contained a quantity of sticky, gummy, blackish substance, which gave forth a peculiar penetrating odor.

"Mott Street had plenty of opium," went on Mrs. Prentiss Harvard. "But it was difficult to bring to San Francisco. The authorities have been suspicious for some time, so they were watching my every move. It was easy to get this girl to bring in the stuff, however. They never suspected her."

"Oh!" Jane gave a little moan of anguish. Her desire for luxury and pretty clothes had brought her to this.

BUT the cruel woman in the Pekin-blue garb was talking on: "That man should have stuck to his regular job of engineering!" she said, pointing to Randall. "His pal was on the narcot squad and he got—hurt."

She gave a sharp little laugh.

"So this man vowed vengeance. He makes a pretty figure of a detective now, doesn't he?" She stretched her arms widely and yawned. "Well, let's get rid of them quickly. The poison pellets would be quickest, I think."

But the old man was turning his head in a listening attitude. "Some one is coming!" he said.

"Nonsense! No one knows what lies behind the blue door but—" She broke off in the middle of the sentence.

The door shivered under the impact of a mighty blow. Another blow and the door fell inward. Then the room was swarming with keen-faced men armed with businesslike revolvers. Jane's captors loosed her arms and ran for their lives. Everything was a confused mêlée of scurrying Chinese,

squeaking like frightened rats, and the thud of fists, and the sound of running feet.

Some one unbound Randy and he sprang to Jane.

"Are you all right?" he shouted.

She clung to him. "Yes, but are you—"

Before he could reply, one of the men came over to Randall.

"Well, that's over," he said. "Got 'em every one! We followed your orders and trailed you everywhere you went, from the minute you hit San Francisco. Even though you did say that you'd rather have us stay away tonight because there wasn't any danger, and you were just going out with your best girl!"

He chuckled.

"Nice best girl she turned out to be! How about her? Does she go in the wagon along with the rest?"

Jane swayed and would have fallen, had it not been for Randy's arm about her waist.

"Not much!" he said. "You've got her all wrong. I employed her in New York to help trick these crooks. But it's been a pretty exciting evening for her, so if we aren't needed right now—"

The man shrugged. "Have it your own way," he said. "You can appear against the gang to-morrow."

Randall stooped and picked up the parcel containing the mandarin coat.

"We don't want to forget this," he said.

Jane began to cry. He lifted her in his arms and strode through all the rooms, clear to the street. The cool night air, wind-swept from the bay, was heavenly after the stuffy places they had been.

"I'm all right now," she said and struggled out of his arms.

"Sure you can stand?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes." Her voice caught in her throat. "I didn't know—" she began wildly. But he laid his fingers gently on her lips.

"I understand," he said. "I know all about it."

"I don't know how to thank you!" She wiped her eyes on her wisp of a handkerchief. "If—if you'll call a taxi, I'll go back to the hotel," she said pathetically.

"Why not 'we'?" queried Randy.

She shook her head. "I can see that you were just making love to me because you had to—to keep track of me," she said with a little truant sob which slipped out despite her efforts. "It's all right. I—I understand!"

But he caught her close in his arms as if he never intended letting her get away.

"Do you—understand?" he asked her.

And after he had kissed her eight or ten times, Jane said that she did!

David's heart was in his eyes as he watched the two

Everything But Love

When all else was lost to her, Rose found the thing she sought

By Mary Frances Doner

ROSE BARKER had been born on "the wrong side of the bridge." In Barrytown, that meant that she was socially ineligible. Further, she was the daughter of old Pindy Barker, town miser. In all her starved life, Rose had never had enough food, enough clothing—or enough love. Never had anything—much.

So when old Pindy died suddenly and Rose found herself heiress to many thousands of dollars, the first thing she did was to install herself in a lovely old house on the *right* side of the bridge, with servants and plenty of pretty clothes. Near Georgia Hoyt, the only school girl chum who had stayed her friend as they grew up — and near

David Marsh, newcomer in town, whom every Barrytown girl thought she wanted.

Rose loved him. For always.

But she was just a newly-rich-nobody, and David's family had the best blood in the county.

Then David asked her to marry him. Oh, it was only because of her money—for his father was turning him out. He made this clear.

Rose married David. In time she hoped that he would learn to love her.

But after a few months of near-happiness in New York, during which her fortune dwindled to almost nothing, Georgia Hoyt appeared for a visit and David fell in love with her.

Rose, confronted by Georgia with a demand for David's freedom, left him.

She found a position, but lost it immediately.

CHAPTER X—*(Continued)*

YOU get so used to people. Kind people. People who understand. Rose got used to Cricket. There was an understanding between them that held. After the first few weeks, he succeeded in achieving a gayly impersonal manner that was dearer than the morning sun to Rose. She looked forward to their times together: the cool, refreshing rides in his big, comfortable car after the long hot day, the pleasant hours over dinner now and then.

He would say to her, "Is this tie too loud, Rose? They've been kidding me about it."

And she would say to him, "This dress isn't bad for nineteen fifty, is it? The lines are good and the shade is darling. I simply can't afford more for one—even if you will take me to Pierre's for lunch, Cricket!"

That sort of conversation. Intimate, friendly remarks saved for these moments.

"The shop was crowded today," she told him one evening late in August. "I'm simply dead. But oh, Cricket, I love books so! I'm a glutton. I go browsing around like an old granny. You were a darling to get me that job. I'm happy—" She broke off in the midst of a laugh. Happy.

He looked down at her with fond concern in his eyes.

"You're getting thin, Rose—too thin. Your eyes—why, the shadows are like big black butterflies. Rose, isn't there some way you could see your way clear to go to the shore for a week or two? I know Collins would be glad to give you a vacation with pay, even though you've been there such a short time."

She shook her head slowly.

"Cricket, you don't know any such thing. What you really mean is that you'd pay Mr. Collins to let me take a vacation; but I don't like things done that way. Besides, I love the work, and—"

"Rose!" came swiftly, achingly, as if torn from him. "For God's sake, stop it—stop eating out your heart for Dave Marsh!"

Only her wide dark eyes answered him, her brave, smiling eyes. "Silly! What makes you say such things to me?"

He stopped the car, stared straight ahead, then dropped his head in his arms on the wheel in a tense, aching silence.

She reached over, touched his hair. "Cricket," she whispered, "I wonder if your pain is deeper than mine. . . ."

He raised his eyes, smiled at her after a moment with weary resignation. "The dinner at The Golden Crow

is usually good, isn't it? How about it, Rose?"

She dropped her cheek to his hand—and the car leaped forward.

CHAPTER XI

COLLINS'S BOOK SHOP was a very smart shop in a smart section on Madison Avenue. It aimed to please. If you wanted a new book or magazine, a bridge prize, a gift for a suddenly remembered birthday, you could always run in there or telephone and the service was marvelous. Oftentimes Rose was rushed out with a majolica jar under her arm, or a copper bowl, or a set of Millay's poems, or the new Guild book.

"Here, Miss Barker, leap into a taxi with this and deliver it in your usual charming manner. Mrs. What's-Her-Name wants it there in ten minutes Last week she bought a raft of stuff—"

And so, on this day in late summer, when things were not especially busy and a call came from the Westons, Rose tied the articles in party style. And, as she tied, the name kept tumbling through her mind like a little brook. Weston.

She smiled vaguely, sadly. It brought a memory of friendly faces—a couple she had met in the dear dim past. Dave had been there, too. Bermuda. Friendly people on a holiday. A casual meeting, an evening spent together. Laughter, dancing, music—had those days ever really been?

She tied a woolly dog with tissue paper and pink ribbon; and a pirate's suit with gold cord; and a talking doll with blue ribbon. Gifts for a children's party. She gathered up the packages and started out.

On the twelfth floor of a very grand apartment house on Park Avenue, she found a children's party in progress. The family was starting off for Europe at midnight, the maid informed her as they passed through the rooms. Mr. Weston, the maid said, had been taken suddenly ill in Paris, and Mrs. Weston was leaving with the children. She was to be pitied—the way those youngsters cut up—

"This is the young lady from the book shop," the maid told her mistress as they reached a large sunny room. Tissue paper was everywhere; satin mules and filmy negligees and frocks and hats and wraps were scattered about over chairs and bed and tables and floor. Children were screeching and laughing in the room beyond, and the distracted mother turned absently and said, "Yes—that's fine—so glad. Would you be good enough—"

Then she stopped suddenly, for she saw Rose standing there, and Rose clenched her hands at her sides as their eyes met. The same Mrs. Weston—the same lovely, charming woman of Bermuda; a dream person come to life, part of the enchanting past, part of the lost yesterday—

Cara Weston's eyes lighted. "How do you do? Do you know—I've met you somewhere—"

Rose smiled innocently, while her heart thundered. This woman should not know her humiliation—her pain. She said, "My name is Barker. Mr. Collins sent me over with the gifts. So—so you see, you must be mistaken."

A swift frown, a curious smile. "Well—possibly," she shrugged; then took the small packages and demanded to know which was which. "The party is for Lisa—though I'm half distracted with the thing. It's Lisa's birthday, and we're sailing at midnight, and I'd forgotten it until the last minute. She thought I was planning a surprise for

her—so I had to. Lisa is the bossy little red-headed one. Isn't she adorable? Just like her father!"

ROSE stood watching them. Busy, determined little Lisa who knew what she wanted and went about getting it. And another dark lovely infant with tousled hair and skin too beautiful. Her mother called her Jimp. And a small tyrannous boy who pretended he was a pirate and shouted about it at the top of his lungs.

"Dear goodness, what will I do?" groaned Mrs. Weston, covering her eyes suddenly with her hands. "It's all so confused—and I'm not equal to it. This party, and getting the children ready, and rushing them off to their father— He's ill. They tell me it isn't serious, but—"

"He's ill?" put in Rose with concern.

"Yes—in Paris. It's that wretched side of his again. I'm really not able to travel, but if anything should happen, and the children—it's just worn me out thinking about it. Oh, Elise, Elise, do hurry and get the table fixed for the children! I know, but they're getting fidgety—and I won't disappoint Lisa, if we go without our trunks. It's—"

"Let me do it!" begged Rose. "*Please!*"

Cara Weston sighed. "Oh, if you only would! I'm half mad with everything. If my sister were only here, I could leave the children in her care—but of course she's abroad, too. And I've been pulling all the wires imaginable to get passage to-day. I'm exhausted," and suddenly she was crying softly, "and my darling Charles over there ill—needing me—"

Rose quietly went about the task of making ready for Lisa's impromptu party. She spread the lace cloth on the pretty enameled table in the nursery and decorated it to her heart's content. From beyond, the merry laughter of children echoed like music from a world she would never know; a normal world, of children and laughter and music and love; a world at which she might peek, now and then, from behind the fence that circumstance had built about her.

Lisa, the bossy little red-headed one. Adorable, like her father. Rose stood gazing around the lovely room, and fought the tears when she remembered that this life would never be hers; this particular sort of heaven. Adorable, like her father. . . . Rose saw a small, insolent, gleaming-eyed bit of humanity dance down the path of dreams—with David's eyes and David's smile and David's proud, swift step; a wraith that drifted ever through her consciousness, a ghost that held out tiny, loving arms. . . .

They had their party. Rose stayed on, enchanted; forgetting the shop, forgetting everything in this one golden moment of what-might-have-been.

Cara Weston glanced in now and then, found Rose playing games with them, telling them stories, holding the small bossy red-headed one against her heart.

AT last, Rose snatched up her hat and turned abruptly. No use to pretend she wasn't crying now. No use to stop the tears. She would have passed out without a word to the charming mother, but Mrs. Weston called to her gently. "You're going—without good-by?"

"I've stayed hours," Rose told her, "and the shop will be closing now. Perhaps I've been too presuming. I'm —sorry—"

"My dear," Cara Weston told her, "I called the shop and told them you would not be back. You were too wonderful with the children. So far, I've never found any one who could keep Lisa from smashing every dish on the table, and acting like an absolute hoyden. You have a way with you—well, it's remarkable, considering Lisa," she added, with a rueful, loving smile at her incorrigible baby.

"I forgot everything," Rose said slowly. "They're so wonderful—"

"Why don't you have children of your own?" Cara Weston asked her quietly.

Something in the woman's tone made Rose glance at her sharply.

Cara Weston smiled. "I remember you, my dear. I never forget people I care to remember. You are David Marsh's pretty wife. We met you one evening in Bermuda, last winter. You looked so lovely in white—a picture. Did you think I wouldn't remember?"

Too vividly, the scene flashed before Rose. Tropic seas, a balmy zephyr—like a zephyr in a dream, and she and David strolling along the broad veranda of the Hamilton listening to music like no music she had ever heard before.

White—yes, she had worn white, a soft billowy thing that David had said looked like a little lost cloud in the darkness—a cloud drenched with stars! Dave had said that—that night. Her arm in Dave's, his head inclined now and then, to laugh about something, to tell her this wasn't such a bad place, it wasn't such terrible music—

And she had waited and prayed that he might tell her that he loved her. But he had not told her that. He had only said, "A fellow could grow fond of you—without any trouble." He had said that. . . .

Cara Weston regarded her thoughtfully. "Will you consider me presuming if I ask you a question?"

Rose smiled at her, an old sad smile, and shook her head. She knew the question.

"You are so young, my dear. And you are so beautiful, and you both seemed so happy. I remember at the time how Charles and I decided you were bride and groom. We *knew*. No woman could have that look in her eyes—otherwise. And yet, there was fear in your eyes, too; a strange fear for the eyes of a bride! Did you, even then, fear the thing that—that seems to have happened?"

"I knew it would happen. It was inevitable."

"Charles has seen considerable of David Marsh," Cara Weston said, after a moment. "Of course, your husband makes no pretense of taking flying seriously. It's like a game he's playing. Stunts, records—that side of the story interests him most. He'd make a name for himself if he ever set out to. He's a playboy—that's all."

Then she threw out her hands carelessly.

"It was such a little while ago—and you were so happy. I didn't think a thing like that could end so soon. There's—someone else?"

Rose bit her lip, colored. She could not discuss it with this stranger. And yet, to hear Dave's name alone was heaven.

"Charles is deeply interested in aviation," Cara Weston went on hurriedly. "He has put considerable money in it. It was at the field that he heard—about your separation—and—the other girl."

And then Rose clenched a hand against her eyes and turned away. "Everyone knows—everyone—"

"Let me help you!" begged Cara

Weston. "Perhaps I can. It might be easier if you talked about it. . . ."

AND suddenly Rose found herself pouring out the story here with this woman's arms about her. She had needed this moment.

"Can't something be done about it?" demanded Cara Weston stormily. "A woman like that—"

Rose shook her head. "She is secure. She has family, background, money. Everything is in her favor."

"And—you?" gently.

Rose told her then; had to make her understand. In a few brief sentences, she explained why Rose Barker, from the shack beyond the bridge, had no chance.

"Where are you living now?" asked Cara thoughfully when Rose had finished.

"In a funny little room over on Lexington Avenue." Rose smiled as she brushed at wet eyes. "There's one window in it, but it's so high I can't see outside. So I pretend it's high above a garden and everything's all right!" she smiled gayly. "I've had the nicest time—and thanks a lot!" She reached for her gloves. "I hope you find your husband much better, and I'll say a special prayer that the children will be darlings during the trip!"

"I'm not sure they're going," mused Cara Weston aloud.

And then, "Rose Marsh—you *are* Rose Marsh, you know, whether you call yourself that or not! Stay with my children, will you? Keep them here safe and sound, and it will take your mind off things. In the meantime, who knows what may happen?"

Rose stared at her, incredulous, speechless.

"Why not?" asked Cara Weston eagerly. "You can stay here, or take them back to the Long Island place. I'll leave everything in your hands. You'll be doing me a tremendous favor—and—you can't tell what might happen. No one needs to know about your affairs. If you only knew how it would help me out—how eternally grateful I'd be to you—" And as Rose hesitated, "Think of one good reason?" she begged.

"But—why—well, my job," laughed Rose lamely, unable to believe the thing she had heard.

"Pouf!" Cara Weston dismissed it with a gesture. "If you still hanker after the book shop, I'll get you the job of manager when I return. Is it a bargain?"

OUT beyond, you could see a small, bossy red-headed darling delivering an impromptu speech at her birthday party. You could see a smaller, adorable infant stuffing angel food into her small pink mouth. You could see a small boy, who called himself a pirate, brandishing a miniature sword and threatening their lives. A month of this. A month of laughter and love, of tucking them into bed and brushing tousled heads and romping through a Long Island garden with them—hiking, playing together, listening to woes and joys—

"You know I will," she said thickly. "I can't help myself."

"Why do you want to help yourself?"

"When you come back and it's over, what will I do then? I'll have to leave them—"

"Sufficient unto the day," decided Cara Weston sagely, and glanced away with a confident smile. "My dear, you sound like an old woman, and you're only a child! Life does this to everybody, sometime or other. It puts on

a big false face and says "Boo!' and if you run to cover, it goes scampering after you. But if you turn around and say "Boo yourself!' it usually runs in the other direction. I've found that out."

"How?" Rose had to ask.

"I'll tell you." She met Rose's eyes steadily. "Once upon a time, a certain well-known young lady threatened the peace and happiness of my home. I'd been married less than a year. She thought she loved my husband. I knew I loved him—enough to fight for him. And I won!" There still lingered in her frank brown eyes the memory of that struggle. "You see, the whole scheme of things is conflict. We survive or perish, according to our efforts. And—"

"But he loved you," Rose reminded her in a whisper. "That's the difference. I've never really had the sort of happiness that you think—"

"We don't mourn ghosts." Cara Weston smiled wisely.

CHAPTER XII

"THE gentleman distinctly said he wished to see Miss Barker," the butler told her politely on an afternoon late the following week, as she sat figuring out a picture puzzle for Lisa.

"But, Clark, I'm not expecting anyone."

She glanced away in confusion, a quick hand flashing to her hair. Could Cricket have heard? Dear old Cricket! It would be so good to see him. She had decided only this morning to drop him a note and tell him the whole thing. With a word to the children, she followed Clark down the hall.

At first, she could not believe that it was David. He stood moodily ruffling the leaves of a book, one hand in his pocket, the line of his face and head outlined with a vagrant ray of sunshine that fell across the room. She stood in the doorway, hands clasped tightly together, the dull blue chiffon of her frock framing her young beauty with alluring charm.

"Rose!"

He slammed the book shut sharply. They faced each other for a moment in silence. Then, "What are you doing here?" he demanded with the old arrogance.

She knew she would have to see it through lightly. The days of taking things seriously had passed. Cara Weston was right. The whole scheme of things is conflict. We survive or perish, according to our effort.

"I'm having the nicest kind of a time," she told him. "Cara's children are too precious. She's gone gallivanting off to Europe, and I'm playing nurse. But they do behave beautifully—considering. Sit down, Dave, won't you? And have a cigarette. Charles has his favorites, of course—here they are."

She slid open the little silver box and held it before him, wondering at her own temerity in speaking with such careless ease of the prominent Charles Weston.

"Isn't it a gorgeous day?" She lighted a cigarette and took a chair opposite, watching the light play on his handsome, moody face; on his hands, his hair—and down deep in her heart, a cry raised itself. "My man, God—*my man!* Out of eternity—into eternity—forever! Help me!"

"How long have you and the Westons been friends?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Oh—I don't know. I really don't remember. I met them first in Bermuda — we met them, I

should say." Her smile was pleasant. "Of course, you don't remember."

"No?" A sulky glance at her. "Of course, I *do* remember! I see Charlie Weston often out at the field, when he isn't abroad. Say, what's come over you, Rose? You're not the same."

Her eyes had found him—

She laughed lightly. "But you are, Dave. All the old growls polished up, and a new frown or two to relieve the monotony."

"What's the big idea? Giving me a ride?"

She shrugged, gestured carelessly, rang for Clark. "Since you're here, we may as well be sociable." And when the servant appeared, she told him to bring tea at once.

"I didn't come for tea," snapped David, "and—look here! It seems to me you've very gay and merry, considering how you walked out on me—and no questions asked!"

"That's it, Dave. No questions asked. It's always better that way. Don't you think so?"

"You're like a different person!" he stormed.

AND she laughed again, laughed into his puzzled eyes. "Am I to believe that you have spent sleepless nights and employed detectives and offered huge rewards?"

He glanced away, flushed. "It did give me a jolt when you left."

Something stirred in her heart. Hope. Then it wearied and died, knowing its own futility. She could not laugh now. The effort was too great. "You were bored to death, Dave. Admit it. And it was all so—so useless, wasn't it?"

"Of course!"

"Then, why shadow a pleasant afternoon discussing what really turned out to be nothing more than a social error?"

"You're hard, Rose." He studied her through narrowed eyes. "You didn't use to be like this."

"Tell me about your work, Dave." Gently she discouraged further discussion of the subject. "How are things going?"

Clark brought tea. She poured, busied herself with sugar and lemon. It gave her a moment's respite.

"Not so good." His voice was discouraged. "Remember Haines? I told you about him—the fellow who sent Maybury to St. Louis that time? He's been double-crossing me. Rotten disposition—jealous as the devil. Beats me out of every break that comes my way. I had a fellow interested in putting on a big air carnival and Haines crabbed the act. It would have been a gay time. Found some nuts and bolts loose on my plane a couple of times.

It's Haines, I'm sure. If I had what's coming to me—if Dad would only snap out of it, I'd show Haines a thing or two—"

Like another day. She had served then to listen to moments like this, to blue outbursts, tales of discouragement. "Keep a stiff upper lip, Dave," she told him. "You've got to in this world. Don't let him double cross you. Beat him at his own game. He's trying to steal your record for endurance flying, and you know it. Well, watch out for this underhand stuff, and—"

She went on seriously, advising, encouraging him, raising his spirits. For that one moment, it seemed that this dark interlude was just a dream, and she would wake and find herself before her own fire, watching the clock, waiting for Dave to come home—watching for Dave—

He listened gloomily, protested now and then, argued, snapped back at things he disagreed with, growled a reluctant yes to things—

"I didn't know you were clubby with the Westons," he said presently. "I've got to know Charlie pretty well. He never mentioned it."

"He probably knows it isn't being done — mentioning unmentionables." She smiled evenly.

"Where do you live now?" The tone of his voice was curious, but he opened a magazine on the table beside him, as if it didn't in the least matter and he was just making conversation.

"Oh—here and there. And you?"

He shrugged. "Is that important?"

"Sometimes," she returned flippantly. "It depends on one's taste."

He looked at her in amazement, as if he had never seen her before. He paced about the room slowly, detached, thoughtful. He said, presently, "I'm getting fed up, trying to buck my father. He's stubborn as the deuce—won't loosen up a bit unless I get into the kind of work he approves. Here I am, hanging around, wanting to do big things, and my hands are tied. It's the breaks, I suppose." He lighted another cigarette.

—and then he saw her and there was a tense moment. Georgia glared

WHAT of Georgia? thought Rose. Was he trying to make her believe that Georgia had faded from the picture, too?

"In the meantime, Dave," she said

something she had always wanted to say, "why don't you start doing something for yourself?" It couldn't matter now—what she said. He was worlds apart from her. "Lindy didn't wait until people did things for him. He got out and did things himself. Suppose you could make a name for yourself? Why don't you take a mail route? Start at the bottom. There's always a chance to do something big and exciting. It won't mean much money, but you'll be plugging along and keeping busy and learning things and earning a little besides."

"Yes, darned little!" he agreed, with a hollow laugh. "Well"—after a moment's silence—"we might discuss the reason for my call here—since we've discussed everything else . . . Mrs. Weston called up and left word for me to stop over here and get some dope Charlie had left for me—papers about the new hangar at Lakehurst. He's promised them to me for a month. She told me to ask for you. Lord! I didn't know who I was going to bump into. I guess the Westons are a little sentimental, eh?"

He grinned.

"This excuse of theirs is so thin we won't see through it, of course, will we?" How superior he was, how above the petty things of life! "By the way, didn't you like the name of Marsh any longer?"

"It never was really mine, was it, Dave?" She rose and went to the big walnut desk beyond. "The papers are here." It was Charles Weston's desk. Cara had said when leaving: "If some one calls for this package, please deliver it personally, will you, Rose? It concerns business of Charles." Cara had contrived this. Cara, who understood.

She handed David the package.

He took it, paused a moment, and looked down at her. There was a softening of the harsh, indifferent smile—just the barest sign of it. "I never knew your eyes were blue. They're just the color of that dress."

She laughed tremulously. "Singular, isn't it? And, by the way, if you don't mind my saying so, that tie just won't do with that shirt and suit. You must have pulled the wrong one out of the drawer."

"I did!" he agreed with an amused laugh. "But it's the telephone—it's always the telephone. I'm going to have it disconnected. It rings incessantly."

"The price of popularity!" she observed gayly. Her heart whispered: "Georgia—that's who it was. She calls him incessantly. They're in love with each other. This won't count — *you* never count. You never will!"

"ARE you *ever* comin' back?" demanded the small, bossy, red-headed darling in the doorway. "Jimp's gone and spoiled my puzzle, an' I'm simply *furious!*" She ran to Rose's arms, and Rose caught her up as if she were a feather. "Who's that man?" demanded Lisa, turning her big brown, curious eyes on him. One small arm circled Rose's neck.

Rose held her close, cheek against the small velvet cheek, one hand holding the rounded little body in a close, curved clasp. "He's a man sometimes, and a bird sometimes."

"And not much of anything all the time," supplied David with a wry laugh. A hesitant hand reached out, touched the curly red hair. "It's real, isn't it?" he said to Rose, meeting her eyes in mock bewilderment.

"What did he mean?" demanded Lisa.

"Does she ever stop asking questions?" wondered David aloud.

"When she's asleep—and just long enough for me to look up a few more answers," laughed Rose.

It was a picture that even the most casual observer would remember. David stood looking at her and Lisa. For rather a long moment. "Well—I'm off, and thanks for the tea!"

"Good-by!" she said, and clung to Lisa, warmed her hungry heart against that small, vibrant body. "Good-by!" she said again through a brave, frank smile.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN she saw him again she was dining at a smart Park Avenue restaurant with Cricket, and he came in with Georgia, more radiant than Rose had ever seen her. Georgia, in a striking frock of black tulle, embroidered with flat jet paillettes, her heavy pearls wound round her throat, her dark satiny hair drawn tightly and with exquisite line to mold a frame for her proud head, an evening wrap of rich black moiré and sable dropping from her shoulders. She commanded attention as she leisurely made her way to the table beyond.

"Isn't she the most beautiful thing you ever saw?" Rose asked Cricket in a whisper, unable to tear her gaze from that table where Georgia and David sat.

"She's attractively dressed, and she knows how to carry herself," agreed Cricket, "if that's what you mean. But that dress you're wearing—what color is it, lavender or blue or what? Well, that's what I call stunning!"

"The dress, as you very well know, is mine only by Cara's kind generosity. She begged me to wear some of her things."

"Don't argue with me, Rose," he scolded, smiling. "And don't expect me to agree with you on such absurd statements. For I won't!"

She smiled and shrugged carelessly, and her heart beat with thunderous rhythm. David—David—

Try as she would, she could not keep her eyes from him. David in dinner clothes, slim, handsome. And then he saw her, and Georgia's glance leaped to the object of Dave's attention. There was a tense, weighted moment. They all smiled, consciously, with strained politeness.

Cricket said: "Don't let it hurt you, Rose. It was bound to happen. They're seen everywhere together. I suppose I'd better tell you the latest gossip before some one else gives it to you on a bayonet. Georgia came into some money recently. Her mother's people, I believe. Things ought to move thick and fast now."

Perhaps the things Cricket said were true, but she couldn't bear them. "It's the way he was brought up," Rose said in defense. "He's the victim of indulgence. He'd be all right if he had the chance. You can't blame him for his father's mistakes!"

"Rose, darlin'!" Cricket leaned close, took her hand. "Do you think I'd razz anybody you loved?"

"Cricket, I can't stay—I can't! Please—let's go!"

"Want Georgia to gloat?"

She closed her eyes, shook her head, clenched her hands on the table before her. "You're right. Oh, love is madness—you don't know—"

His hand closed sharply over hers. "Be a little kind, Rose — you know how it hurts."

Music. Flowers. Beauty. A bril-

liant gathering of people. Her mind flew about like a squirrel in a cage. Georgia and Dave. Money. A lot of money. The end — the end of even ghostly hope.

CRICKET was talking. He always met a situation adequately. She answered, nodded, smiled. Words. You could die down deep inside, yet your lips could smile.

"I think we can leave gracefully now," he decided presently. "It's been exactly half an hour since they came in. First time I've encountered either of them here. I shouldn't have subjected you to it, Rose, if I'd known."

They went out casually, chatting easily together. When they were safe in the taxicab she dropped her head against his shoulder and wept out her heart. His arm crept about her, held her there.

"Go ahead, darlin', cry it out. I smoke a dozen black cigars every time I stop and realize how much I love you and how hopeless it is."

Her hand groped for his. "Cricket—" And after a long pause: "I—I think you're the most wonderful person on earth!"

"No you don't, darlin', but as long as you think of me at all, I can bear it. And now—if it's a matter of interest to you, I've got two of the best seats in the house for that new mystery play. How about it?"

"I'm just crazy to go!"

"That's a very diplomatic remark—and as such, I take you up on it. Hey, Jack!" he called to the taxi driver. "See if you can get us to Forty-Eighth Street and Broadway before midnight!"

Sitting in the darkness, thrilled and excited by the mystery unfolded before her, diverted, Rose clung childishly to Cricket's hand. He had known the remedy to-night. A mystery play to take you out of yourself. Let his own heart ache, he could help others.

She glanced up at him, wondering at the vagaries of love. It would have been so simple, back there in Barrytown, if she could have loved Cricket, so simple— She saw again the picture of Dave and Georgia at that table, and her heart contracted. "I will learn to love Cricket!" she vowed. "I'll make myself love him, and we'll leave all this wretchedness behind; we'll find happiness somewhere."

And all that night she lay wide-eyed and sleepless, seeing Dave's eyes as they had met hers across that space, knowing that this was her fate. To love and wonder—and suffer—

No early morning sleep in that house. The bossy red-headed one came prancing in shortly after dawn, followed by the small, angelic Jimp, and little Charles leaping along after them.

An hour of play and laughter, of fun and make-believe happiness. These were Rose's children. This was her home. Beyond that wall, David lay sleeping. Soon he would wake and come striding in to demand the meaning of this noise. Then he would get down on his hands and knees, and that small, bright-eyed boy would climb on his back and play horse—that small, bright-eyed boy whose eyes would be like David's eyes, whose smile would be as gay and insolent and heart-breaking . . .

THE telephone rang, and she managed to disentangle clinging arms and leap out of bed and shut herself in the little dressing room beyond and say a breathless hello.

"It's Dave," came the cool, abrupt voice.

"Oh—oh, yes!" Smile, that was the thing. Put carelessness in your tone, and a pleasant nonchalance. "You *are* an early riser, aren't you?"

He grunted something unintelligible. Then: "I've got to see you to-day, Rose. Sorry to bother you. It's important. I can either run up to the Weston place, or you can meet me somewhere for lunch."

"It doesn't matter," she told him. "You could lunch here, if it's more convenient. As a matter of fact, it would be better for me. Lisa broke a valuable jar yesterday. I don't think I should leave them alone so much."

"Social engagements keep you busy?" A shade of sarcasm in his voice.

"Terribly!" A helpless laugh. "What time, Dave?"

"You're throwing the party," he reminded her.

"Say—oh, one o'clock?"

"O K," he agreed. "S' long!"

The conference with Clark lasted a full half hour. Luncheon was ordered with David's preferences well in mind. The dresses in Cara Weston's closet were carefully considered. She decided on another blue—a soft blue crêpe that hung in flattering lines on her lovely body.

She sang all morning, until Lisa protestingly declared: "You make more noise even than Jimp!" She rehearsed the manner that was to carry her through, rehearsed the scene when she must greet him, managed it nobly in imagination.

Yet when he came, and she stood in the library doorway and held out her hand, it trembled, and her knees were water.

There were roses on the library table in a big stone jar, and he had taken one and nervously pulled the petals apart. "Where's the bossy little red-head?" he asked, smiling.

"At the moment," answered Rose, grateful for the impersonal greeting, "she is being scrubbed from head to foot. By a diabolical accident she got into some ink."

"Cute kid." Then: "You know, Rose, the Westons have a peach of a place here. Just exactly the sort of place I've always wanted. I was talking about it yesterday—" He stopped abruptly.

Talking about it. To Georgia, of course. Georgia — discussing their home that was to be, probably. "It is gorgeous, isn't it?" she asked. "Charles Weston made his money through a patent. Some little trick thing on a car—saves gas, I believe."

"Why, Weston came into money, didn't he?" demanded David.

"No. There's his father's picture, and that's his mother." Two pleasant, honest-eyed people of the farm country. An enlarged snapshot of them taken on a farmhouse porch. The picture stood on Charles's desk.

David frowned, snatched up the picture, looked at it closely. "Interesting. I thought he inherited everything he had."

"No. He earned it."

David lighted a cigarette, frowned moodily, shrugged. "Which isn't important in the least," he said airily. "I came about something entirely different—"

"Luncheon is served, Miss Barker," said Clark from the doorway.

They went in together, Rose laughing casually over some trivial thing, the pleasant, gracious hostess. Hours of mental struggle had achieved this, and maybe a prayer or two, a cry to heaven. Crumbs, again. Crumbs from the banquet—

"Won't you sit there, Dave?" Clark drew back her chair.

PRETENDING again. The madness of it! This was their home, hers and David's—

And in the midst of things, Lisa came racing in, hiding little Charles's top under her blouse, and shouting: "He'll hit me—he will—he says he'll shoot me!" And Charles came shouting through the door at the top of his lungs: "That woman swiped my red top—my best one. I want it!"

Ten minutes to settle that. Ten minutes, while Lisa played up adorably to the guest and asked a question every time she took a breath. And it ended by her sitting on his knee, and begging candied pineapple, and charming him into absolute slavery. Little Charles hung close by, giving extravagant descriptions of his newest train that the stranger could take a look at if he wanted to.

It ended by Rose and David climbing the stairs with the two of them and spending an hour in the nursery. The way Dave let them tousle his hair and play with his watch and appropriate his loose silver!

"Lord!" he said at last, when Lisa's head began to nod and little Charles's energy had temporarily spent itself. "I've got to get along. Do you suppose I can gather up my belongings without creating a riot?"

Downstairs again, he seated himself before the library fire and took out a paper. "They're great kids! That little red-headed one—some day, when I'm old and wrinkled, she'll be breaking hearts by the dozen." It made him serious for a moment.

"They liked you, Dave. I think they miss their father."

He was silent. Their eyes met. She let her glance linger. Oh, well—it wasn't too preposterous to think the things she had been thinking. It wasn't too absurd to lose one's self for a little while in dreams of what-might-have-been.

After a moment he jerked himself to, sat forward. "I haven't much time left now, Rose. I've got an appointment," he put in hurriedly, and held a paper toward her, a long legal thing. "It's some business about Ravine Lodge in the Adirondacks — you remember?"

Remember!

"Well, I've got to sell it. I need ready money—a note coming due. I've got to have your signature, they tell me. If you wouldn't mind having that signed before a notary to-day—"

"But it's been in your family for years, Dave!" she protested. "Didn't you say your great-grandfather wanted to keep it in the Marsh name always?"

"Rot!" scoffed David, yet he rose nervously and flung his cigarette into the flames. "All that sentimental bunk, what good is that when you need money? I can get a good figure for the place. It's in great shape—Dad spent some money on it this year. It's ready to bring a price. I've argued with the governor for some money and he still holds out. I haven't any choice left. I've got to have some ready cash."

"Your father will be heartbroken if you sell that place."

"What of it? He could buy it back again. He's got plenty." But he did not meet her eyes.

SHE moved away, stirred by something deeper than she had ever known. Were they all going to let him ruin himself so completely because

they loved him so much? His father, because he had made Dave selfish and headstrong through early indulgence, would let him ruin himself now. He didn't know David.

She trembled at the thought of what would happen to Dave if he kept going on in this same unbridled way. If he had a stern hand over him, a stern yet understanding hand, an intelligent, sympathetic adviser—

She turned suddenly. "Dave, I'm sorry, but I can't sign that paper."

"You're *crazy!*" he said under his breath, pale, incredulous. "You—why—you wouldn't dare!"

She shook her head with quiet ease, but her heart stood still. "You can't sell it if I don't sign the paper—and I'm not going to sign."

"Why—good Lord!—" he began breathlessly, outraged, then stopped.

She faced him with quiet, definite determination.

"Dave," she began, and wondered where this unexpected courage came from, this steady courage that tingled through every nerve in her body, "there's a time in every man's life when he has to look at the truth. You're going to look at it *now!* You have no use for me—you never loved me. I served but one purpose in your life. You will never want to see me again—and that's all right, too. I gave you everything I had, and I'd do it again gladly. I have no regrets. Money and I were strange companions after the years of privation I knew. There isn't anything left, nothing of the money my father left." And at his obvious amazement, she smiled. "Dave, do you think I would keep a penny for myself if I had one to give you?"

"Rose — you mean — you spent everything on me?"

"That's unimportant, Dave. That's over. There's something more vital at stake. Your future. . . ."

"Say, listen here!" he snapped — David, quick to anger. "If you think you're going to lecture me just because we went through a ceremony one time together—"

"I have no desire to lecture you. But I'm going to tell you something you've got to realize, and nobody else has the courage to tell you. They're afraid they'll lose your friendship and your love, and you *are* lovable, Dave. But some one's got to—"

Was this Rose talking? Was this the girl whose heart lay in the dust for love of him? She clenched her hands at her sides.

"I can't lose either, because I never had them. And so I'm going to tell you something. You're going to go on through life depending on others, never knowing the thrill of an earned dollar, smothering the best side of your nature, hating yourself down deep—and not knowing why! Because you're not doing your part. You want to live the gay side of life, and forget that there's a realistic side that someone must live for you—if you refuse to do it yourself. Get out into the world and earn your way for a while. Take your place in the ranks where men are made! Dave, save yourself before it's too late!"

"Have you—finished?" His voice was a strange voice, quivering with fury back of that studied smile. "Then we'll call the revival closed! At the present moment I find it a bit difficult to account for the lapse in my judgment that resulted in my marriage to a person of your type!"

She stood where he had left her, laughing softly, brokenly.

"It wasn't any use. I might have

known it wouldn't be. Oh, David, David!"

CHAPTER XIV

IT was April when she saw him again. Only this morning had she returned from a week-end at the Weston place out on Long Island.

The winter months at the shop had been interesting, but the old haunting loneliness left shadows in the brave blue eyes. And perhaps despair.

Why did she haunt that once beloved paradise in Washington Square? What possible cheer could the sight of it offer—the sight of it there in the spring sunshine, radiant and gay, birds singing under its eaves, brave ivy climbing up the chipped brick façade? Those windows—that window there—that broad, shining window in which she had stood a thousand times, waiting, watching, her heart thundering at the sight of that tall, swift figure striding through the dusk—

They met face to face. Curiously agitated, obviously annoyed at his agitation, David spoke first. "Living around here now?"

"No. An errand," she faltered.

He grunted, nodded, shrugged indifferently. "Funny—my running into you this way. Your friend Hearth looked me up the other day." He watched her, his eyes accusing, shadowed with bitterness.

"Cricket?" The remark had succeeded in disarming her, as he hope it would.

"Yes. Of course you don't know why!" Infinite sarcasm, triumph.

"No, I don't know why. Did it concern me, Dave?"

He laughed, his words brittle. "You will have your little joke, I suppose. Do you think I'm a fool? You're supposed to be innocent—is that it? Unenlightened, waiting for the surprise to be sprung on you! Listen, Rose, give me credit for having a little sense!"

She stood before him in a simple blue suit with a bit of inexpensive fur at her throat, wind whipping color into her cheeks, dazed a little at his words, at the miracle of seeing him again. "Is it necessary to snarl that way, Dave?"

He laughed hollowly. "No. I'll sing it in the key of C for you. You haven't a tuning fork handy, have you?"

A laugh—a little frightened laugh. "No—not now. Once I struck my tuning fork on a star—and dropped it into—eternity."

"And how do you sing without it now?" Oh, the bitterness of that smile!

"My songs—are all sung!"

"Cricket will teach you some new ones—if he has a chance," he retorted with a brutal grin. "And since you were so accommodating when I asked a favor, I'll show you what it is to be refused. At any rate I'll give you credit. You're not so slow. Hearth has a bunch of money. It would be wise to marry him. Well, so long!"

He walked away without another word and she continued on her way, little dry sobs choking her. David—David— He had grown thinner, more irritable. His eyes looked haunted, wretched. He was just a little shabby. David *shabby!*

"I DIDN'T intend to tell you," Cricket answered her determined questioning about Dave, that evening, when they dined together at a little restaurant in the Village. He reached across the table, covered her hand with his.

"Rose, it got the best of me, feeling this way about you. Things between

you and Dave are hopeless. Nothing more will ever come of it. The best days of your life are shuffling away. You spend your days behind a counter waiting on disagreeable people and I love you! Don't you understand? I want to make you my wife. And I went to Dave and asked him to settle things legally—give you your freedom and make a clean break."

"You did that, Cricket?" came breathlessly. "And—and what did he say?" Her hands were in a knot on the table before her.

Cricket shook his head, eyes narrowed as he remembered the scene. "He refused. He told me to—*get out!*"

"But why?" begged Rose, breathless. "He doesn't love me—I never see him—" Could it be that a spark remained? That somewhere, somehow, a thread held them together—a frail thin thread?

"No, Rose, it isn't what you hope!" And he dropped his head in his hands suddenly. "He's bitter. That deadlock between him and his father still stands. And his father won't give him a cent still, because Dave won't weaken. Dave knows his father will weaken sooner or later, and he's trying to mark time, but it's a tough business. Old David Marsh seems to be a pretty healthy specimen, but I've heard he has a weak heart. He's drawn a will against Dave, you know—and if he should pass out—"

Cricket shrugged.

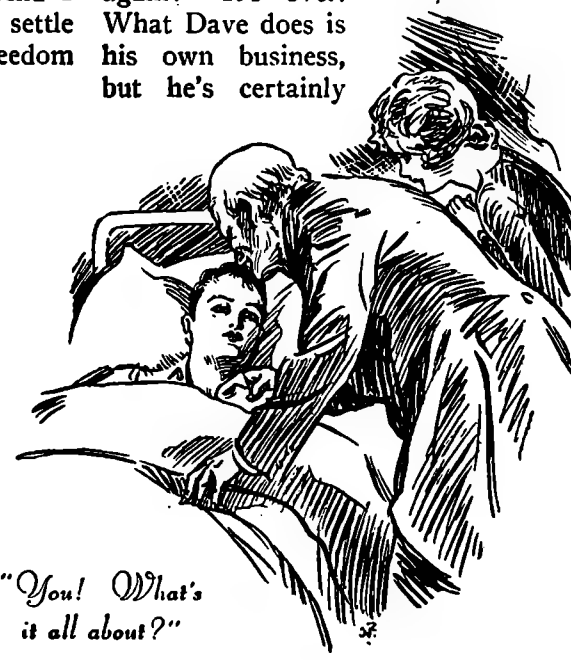
"Well, you never can tell. And now that he's broken with Georgia—"

"You mean—they—Dave and Georgia—" Words came tumbling thick and fast, incoherently.

"Lord! Hasn't Cara Weston told you?" incredulously.

"I won't talk about Dave. I've told Cara."

Cricket shook his head. "Oh, Lord, what's the use of raking up all this stuff again? It's over. What Dave does is his own business, but he's certainly



"You! What's it all about?"

shown you how he feels about you. I guess he's shown Georgia, too. She was pretty jealous, and Dave got sick of it. She wanted to spend all her money on him—and own him. And that didn't go with Dave.

"So you see it wasn't one of the great love stories of the world, after all. He hangs around the flying field some, the story goes. Cara could probably tell you a lot more." His smile was wretched as he watched her—Cricket, who loved her in vain.

"Rose!" he leaned forward swiftly. "You have every reason in the world to be free of David Marsh. He would not have a leg to stand on and he knows it. He's never contributed a cent toward your support. He's had his

good times and you've made the grade as well as you could. Listen, darlin', let me help you pull yourself out of that situation. It's taking the best years of your life. And then—we could go away and be happy together. I love you so, Rose!"

"Cricket—please—don't you understand? It just couldn't be."

She clasped his hand. "You're the best friend I've got in the world, Cricket—but—*don't*—don't speak like that about Dave!"

When he left her at her door a little later, he told her: "I guess there's no use, Rose. I've done my best to make you happy. I've stood by, but a fellow reaches the point where—well—he just can't go on indefinitely. If you're willing to take a chance with me, I'll spend every cent necessary. You can go to Mexico, Reno, anywhere, and get the thing settled. Then we'll be married and go to Europe for a year or two. Things are in shape with my work. I can leave it. But—I've got to know *now*, Rose."

She slipped her arms around his neck and drew his head down and kissed him. "Good-by, Cricket — dear Cricket—dear—friend—"

And with a choking sob, she fled into the house.

CARA WESTON stopped in the shop that next afternoon. "It isn't in the papers yet," she whispered, catching Rose's hand in a sharp grasp. "I just heard it. Old David Marsh died this morning. Heart attack. He's disinherited Dave. Charley had lunch with a cousin of Dave's. Can you imagine it? The old gentleman must have been pretty bitter. Listen, dear, I've got a few more things to do, and I'll drop back after you. Come up to the house with me then to dinner. Oh, don't argue, silly! We won't dress. Just you and I and those tormenting darlings of mine climbing all over us. Charley's dining out. Be seein' you!"

Over coffee in the dim and beautiful Weston library, Rose told the story to Cara. Aching with pent up longings and despair, she found a blessed relief in discussing Dave.

"I didn't know about Dave and Georgia." Rose beat her hands together softly. "I've been waiting for Dave to make the first move—toward divorce."

Cara laughed sharply.

"My dear, I'm afraid there's nothing solid enough about Dave to count on. It's not only been Georgia Hoyt, but several other very beautiful and very dumb flappers whose daddies are rich and indulgent. There was a time when I would have urged you to cling to hope, to fight for your man—but not now." Cara shook her head sadly. "It's no use. I wish things could be so arranged that you could marry that nice Cricket person. He adores you."

Rose shook her head slowly. "I won't be seeing Cricket any more. I sent him away definitely."

"Rose, dear, women are fools to waste their lives over a broken dream. What has David Marsh ever given you but misery? He's never done a useful thing in his life. He's stubbornly defied his father and now he'll pay the penalty. And we'll see how many of these gay friends will stand by. It was all right while he was the heir to the Marsh millions — but now, when he owes them all and there isn't any prospect of reimbursement—"

Cara threw out her hands helplessly.

"They didn't understand Dave," Rose said in a whisper. "He's been searching for something all his life. He didn't know what. First he thought

it was this thing—then that. He's just as God made him. He can't help it. They spoiled him. It wasn't his fault!" Her eyes shone with faith, and loyalty—and an old, old light.

Cara shrugged impatiently. "Well, all I can say is that I hope Lisa and Jimp will get them to a nunnery when they grow up! If I thought they had to go through things like this!"

"Don't finish it, Cara, because there are a few moments in life worth it." And as Cara's arms went about her, she said, "Heavens! I've got to go. It's late. But Cara, what will become of him?" she begged. "He's always got by—somehow."

"Go home, and don't worry your head about him. I'd like to give him a piece of my mind." But as Rose slowly went down the steps, "Oh, my dear, my poor dear!" she whispered. "*I know!* If it were *Charles!*"

CHAPTER XV

THERE was quite an item about the Marsh death in the paper next morning. And a day or two later, there was an item about the will. Cara had been right. David Marsh had been cut off with a paltry hundred dollars, and the rest of the fortune was bequeathed to charity.

Rose read it a dozen times. Up to now, Dave had just got by, so to speak, securing credit on the Marsh name; borrowing from affluent friends who felt confident that when Dave came into his father's money they would be paid. Now he would be hounded by creditors, beset by worried friends or people he had thought his friends.

The papers gave no information. Cara heard no news of him through Charley, though Rose phoned her daily. He had disappeared. And then one day, a letter came to Rose with a Boston postmark, a letter in Dave's writing, that said:

DEAR ROSE:

Sometimes when you get away from things, it straightens out your perspective. I was all tied up with pretty positive notions in New York.

These days, I have plenty of time to think. And I've decided there wasn't much sense in turning Hearth down the way I did. Go ahead and start proceedings, if you want to. I'm satisfied. I hope you get a good break this time.

DAVID W. MARSH.

That was all. Nothing about himself. Just the cool, indifferent note that one acquaintance might write another.

She wrote a dozen answers before she finally sent this one:

DEAR DAVE:

Your nice gesture deserves a word of thanks. I appreciate your attitude although I'm not interested, at present, in availing myself of the privilege. It's such a nuisance, and it takes a lot of time. However, if it means anything to you, I'll be glad to step up and do my part to secure your freedom.

I heard that you were flying in Boston. Fly high, big bird! You were meant for the clouds. Good Luck!

ROSE.

His answer, several weeks later, had been despaired of for as long a time:

DEAR ROSE:

I just wanted to say that I don't blame you for fighting shy of a second dose of ye well known matrimony. Only, don't judge all fellows by me. The Cricket chap looks on the level. I liked his eyes.

Sure, I'm flying. Flying high, too. I'm inclosing an infinitesimal piece of blue paper—worth an infinitesimal amount. Cash it, for God's sake, and let me feel that I'm making a start at paying back

an atomic part of the fortune you squandered on me.

DAVID MARSH.

P.S.—Say, by the way, how's the bossy little redhead?

On the strength of that, a heart raised its weary head and smiled into the dark stillness of life. Rose got so that she could laugh again, and mean it.

CARA noticed it. She spoke of it one Sunday afternoon in late spring, when she and Rose rambled through her budding garden down on Long Island. "What is it, a new man?" she demanded. "Really, Rose, you've pulled yourself an inch or two out of the abyss, thank the Lord! Oh, and while we're on the subject—for you know what the subject is—I had news to-day of Dave. Care to hear it? You don't seem so excited."

Rose smiled vaguely. "Please."

"Well, since you're so sensible about it, I'll tell you. He's in Boston—one of the Regans saw him there, and they saw he's gone down terribly. Actually shabby. He was trailing around with an impossible looking person—can you imagine? David Marsh, and his father's millions going to charity!"

"By person I presume you mean a girl," conjectured Rose.

"No, of course not. Some fellow—a mechanic, I should judge from the description. Rose, Laurence Lowell is coming down this week-end. I want you to meet him. *Please.*"

Rose laughed. "Laurence Lowell would like that little Southern doll you entertain so often much better than me. Cara, it isn't fun I long for when I come to see you. It's a home and those babies of yours, and your garden, and dinner by candlelight, and the trip to the nursery—and Charles standing on the terrace with his arms around you calling you 'Beautiful!' and not caring if the whole world hears!"

"You could have it all, too, if you'd let people see you once in a while, instead of sticking away at that wretched old job."

"Don't say a word. I've saved some of my salary this year, actually saved it. Cara, isn't that marvelous?"

"You could save thousands that are slipping through Cricket's careless fingers every day!" Cara reminded her.

"Jimp is going to be like you," smiled Rose, shaking her head. "She never gives up an idea."

"I love you, Rose. I want to see you happy!"

"I *am* happy." And Rose wondered why she said it, but deep in her heart she knew it was true.

That night, she permitted herself the luxury of a letter to Dave.

. . . . The bossy little redhead is going to school. She's learning to spell. Any advance on your part, I assure you, will be met by a shower of responses. She loves to write—in fact she writes all over the place. Neither first editions nor rare old manuscripts are safe from the precious vandal. The library wall is being done over. Cara is desperate—and yet rather proud that her offspring can spell five letter words.

Thanks for the infinitesimal piece of blue paper. I disagree with you. The amount was not so infinitesimal.

A fat, bovine creature is living in the apartment at Washington Square. I saw her leaning out of the window, calling down to her negro maid. She has red curtains at the windows, and her name is unspellable—but looks as if it would sound squashy. The mailman surrendered to my not so subtle questioning. The bovine creature is an expert dietitian and food consultant. Life is like that. . . . I just happened to be passing there, and being curious and a woman, I had to know. Wash-

ington Square is a bit of jasmine pinned on the shoulder of a jazz baby in a red dress.

Good night, Dave. ROSE.

The usual century elapsed before his answer came.

. . . . If I wrote the bossy little redhead the censor, in the shape of her very proper mother, would consign it to the waste basket. I'm not the sort who can write to little redheads in big castles with dragons at the gates. Didn't you know? But you might run a finger or two through that hair of hers. It felt like—oh, Lord, I don't remember. It seems so long ago.

Wishing the bovine creature no ill luck, I'd rather relish the thought of her falling out the window. And red curtains—what a sacrilege! Is there no justice? I don't like to think of her sprawled on a big soft couch before a fire where I used to sit—seldom, of course—on a Jacobean bench with its red velvet cushion, and smell gardenias and candle flame and the scent of burning logs.

I've got a job, Rose. I've worked like the devil to land it. Fortunately I had my pilot's license, and I'm beginning Monday on the mail route to New York. Maybe you think it wasn't a pull—with the reputation I'd got for myself. And that guy, Haines—they wrote him for credentials—and did he give me a sock in the eye? Oh, no! I had to be good to live down that masterly brief he mailed the boss. But here I am, and neither flood nor tide nor rain nor sleet shall stay this brave courier from his appointed rounds—or however the old song goes! I'll fly over your house and drop down a gardenia some day. It was your favorite flower, wasn't it?

You promised not to tell. I haven't stopped laughing yet. Who could you tell it to, Rose? They'd walk away while you were talking—if I was the subject. I thought I had a lot of friends. That was one on me. But I'm satisfied. I've got a job and I'm earning a few berries. By the way—I'm inclosing the second infinitesimal offering. Don't buy sables!

DAVE.

P.S.—Washington Square is a remembered song. D.

FUNNY, how after a little while, you get used to things, count on things, live by the crazy rhythm of little hopes realized, little dreams begun. Who was this strange Dave—this new sane person? Across the miles she felt his groping hand reach out for comfort, for stimulus, for encouragement, for the warmth of friendship—to ease the old loneliness with which we are all born, the great and terrible loneliness of the soul.

The day that the messenger boy roamed into the shop, Rose happened to be near and lazily glanced at the name as he handed her the pencil to sign for it. *For her!* She frowned curiously, tore it open. Then, for a long paralyzed moment, she stood staring at the words that danced crazily across the yellow sheet:

David Marsh crashed in plane beyond Doppel, Connecticut. Condition serious, Madelon Hospital, Doppel.

"I hope you've had no bad news," John Collins said anxiously as he reached Rose.

"Will you be kind enough — to call a cab? I must go—at once—at once—"

"Of course, but—"

She heard no more. The next thing she could remember, she was tearing like mad through the Grand Central Station to board a train that would leave in a few minutes for the vicinity of Doppel.

A two and a half hour ride. Terror like sharp, burning thrusts of invisible spears along the ledges of her heart. He was going to die. Of course. There

had been a letter of hers in his pocket, probably. Hence the telegram. He wouldn't care if she knelt beside his bed in that last hour. Nothing could be over when nothing had existed. And for Dave, nothing had existed but a silly situation—a hopeless mess.

Doppel—at last!

Beyond a closed door, Dave. Nurses like white, forbidding soldiers, shutting her out from the paradise of his aliveness that might at any moment drift away as the lightest bubble on the summer air. A surgeon walking away, closing the door quietly after him, a surgeon with tight lips and no smile in his eyes. She reached him in two wooden steps.

"You've got to—tell me— Will he live?"

Pity in his eyes. "Who are you?"

"His—wife—" The words, somehow, rang across her consciousness like clanging steel. His wife. Dave's wife.

Words hung on his lips. He brushed past her roughly, disengaging the arm she clung to. She heard the word "consultation" and that was all.

Putting her off.

Terrified laughter tore at her throat. She wanted to run after him, to wrench encouragement from his words, but she could not move. It was after she reached the wicker settee and threw herself down to yield to the racking sobs of despair, that she heard the man's voice.

"I beg your pardon, but I could not help overhearing you. Did you say that you are the pilot's wife?"

"Yes." She did not look up. Who he was didn't matter. A person—just a curious person who should be kind enough to let her alone.

The man's voice broke as he spoke. "My name is Fabian. I am glad to meet you, my child. I knew Dave's father. He's like a son to me. He can't die—he *can't!*"

"How did you know about the accident?" she demanded, eying him with a blank expression. "How did you get here so quickly?"

"They were kind enough to let me know at once. Come, child. Pull yourself together. It won't do any good this way."

HOURS of a strange eternity passed. A nurse still stood guard at that door. An old man paced the floor, hands locked behind his back, head down. Night grew deeper, more strange, more terrible.

Dawn. And the silent vigil kept. Nurses urged Rose to lie down, to drink this coffee—just a little—it would help. She watched them with eyes that did not see. Only death was visible—death, a crouching black ghost there beside Dave's door—waiting—waiting—

She could not sleep. She must watch, lest death steal in when her eyes were closed. So long did she focus her eyes on that door that at last illusion was definite in her mind.

Sunlight. Darkness again—deep, terrible darkness; and always, that dim, black phantom lying in wait while nurses moved about stealthily, and the strange old man came and went and shook his head, hands clasped behind his back. And dawn again. . . .

The third day, Rose, a wraith, a blue-white ghost, stepped through Dave's door and moved stiffly to his bedside. A smile had fixed itself on her lips. She dropped to her knees.

And out of the depths of that valley in which his soul had been imprisoned, echoed his voice. "Rose—" Oh, strange, strange voice, touched by death, stark still from that terrible en-

counter, warmed to life a bit by something. Was it love? Was it, David?

"It was dark—out there—" His poor, weak hand groping. Oh, yes, David—even yet you groped, dear, restless heart, wanting something. What did you want, David—so much, out there, that you came back to find it?

She dropped her cold cheek to his hand, wet with a tear that would not wait. "It's light now, Dave—" Light—here in the radiant brilliance of his nearness.

"Lord what a fall, Rose! I think I know what hell is like — I looked down into those flames—"

He closed his eyes with the memory of that horror.

"You came back, Dave!" with hushed ecstasy. "They say it's all right." If she could only calm that silly voice, make it gay and confident and strong.

He smiled wanly. "Every bone in my useless body is broken. I feel it all over. I know. . . ."

"It isn't a useless body." Slow tears crept down her cheeks. She was powerless against them.

He smiled. "They shouldn't have bothered you—bringing you out here. It wasn't—right— You don't owe me—anything—"

"I wasn't busy—" she made herself say.

Dave looked at her, at her eyes, her hair, her pale, flower-like face. And something terrible happened. It wrenched her heart, for his eyes filled with tears and he bit his lips and his groping hand again found hers.

"I'm not going to make the grade, Rose." So low, his voice—so old and slow. "They're all so serious here. I understand. So I'm going to tell you something. I think you're the whitest girl I ever knew. I think you're the kindest—and the most generous—and the most beautiful! I got so that I loved you."

A long pause, while she scarcely breathed, waiting.

"A fellow gets lonesome," the labored voice went on. "I did. Your letters—I saved them, and read them over, and remembered how you looked and—and everything. If the breaks had come right, maybe we could have patched things up, Rose, because—I guess — I always loved you, only I didn't know. I—know—now—"

She dropped her head, kissed the pale hand again and again. Dave—Dave—

He smiled, touched her hair. "I used to think it didn't matter—what you thought of me. It did. That's why I got a job. Rose, I couldn't stand your scorn—"

"It wasn't scorn—" she sobbed, hiding her eyes against his hand.

"It must have been. And I deserved it. There were other ways of getting money, after Dad—" He couldn't finish that sentence. In a moment he went on, "Uncle Somerset in Barrytown weakened. Wanted to take me in. Felt guilty, I guess, that he ragged the governor so long about my idleness. But—I turned him down. And—you were to blame."

He smiled vaguely, a look in his eyes she had never seen before.

"Rose—the bossy little red-head—I used to think—Lord! If I had a kid like that—Rose—if you and I had a kid—like that—" And for the first time, their lips met in a kiss that lifted their souls to a heaven beyond words.

AT the surgeon's voice, Rose got to her feet unsteadily. Behind him came the old stranger, smiling, misty-eyed. He put a hand on her shoulder, smiled down at Dave.

"Will you ever stop making people worry, young man?" he demanded in a voice that tried to be stern and failed.

Dave stared at him in confusion. "Old Fabian — you — what's it all about?"

"Yes, I'm here. I've kept my eye on you. You didn't think you'd escape it, did you?" he laughed gently.

"Fabian—" repeated Dave in a whisper. "Did they—send for you—how did they know?"

"They had orders to send for me if anything happened. Seeing that I was custodian of several millions of dollars, in the hope that a certain young idiot would come to his senses—"

David closed his eyes. "Dad's gone, Fabian. The way I feel, I'll be following him soon, myself."

"I've been informed differently," Fabian told him. "This gentleman tells me that you're out of the thicket now. Just a few bones to knit and a few nerves to quiet down and maybe a few scratches thrown in. You gave us a couple of bad days, and this young lady refused to budge from in front of your door. It was an outrage—"

And as Dave tried to speak, he silenced him.

"But then, the Marsh wives always loved their husbands that way. It isn't sane—it's idolatry, but—" He coughed, sniffed, blinked hard and continued. "I've been hoping pretty hard, my lad, that you'd come to your senses before the year was up. You have. The codicil to your father's will—"

"Codicil!" came the thick whisper.

"Yes. The codicil specified that if within the year following your father's death you did one worth while thing—one thing that signified you had mended your ways and were ready to assume the duties and responsibilities of your position as the last of the Marshes—the fortune would come into your hands as the rightful heir."

"But—I can earn my living now, Fabian. And besides, what worthwhile thing have I done? Except to get my neck almost broken; and I spoiled that splendid effort by not finishing the job!"

"You showed that you could stand on your own feet and earn your own living, and cease being a burden and a care!"

"Fabian—if it hadn't been for Rose, if she—"

"I'll discuss that phase of it, some day, when neither of us has anything else to do. Of course, since she deserves some of the credit, as your wife she'll be able to indulge herself after a fashion in some of her whims!" And he smiled fondly on them both. "What Marsh ever lived that didn't owe everything to the woman he loved? The Marshes were like that, my lad. . . . Well, I'm running along now, and thank the Almighty that I'm leaving you alive and in good hands."

Dave sighed, closed his eyes, groped again for Rose's hand. "I'm so tired, Rose—don't go away again—*ever!*" he begged.

"Never, Dave."

And from the depths of a heart now full to overflowing rose the cry to a merciful God above: "My man, God—*my man!* Out of eternity—into eternity—forever!"

THE END

Her Marriage Vows

Sylvie was just "that pretty Ferrall girl's sister"—and it cut her to the heart to lose life's greatest gift

By Helen Ahern

ADALYN FERRALL, glamorous and beautiful, was about to be married to Philip Hayes, the popular magazine illustrator.

Sylvie, her sister, who was neither glamorous nor beautiful, was in the kitchen frosting the wedding cake. With painstaking care she outlined, with a pastry tube, two pink hearts upon the white sugared confection, and connected them with an arrow.

"Now, that's right pretty," observed Mrs. Ferrall, pausing to admire the handiwork of her younger daughter. "Adalyn ought to like that. She always was a great one for pretty things."

"Yes," returned Sylvie mechanically.

She doubted very much whether her sister would enthuse over a homemade wedding cake. Adalyn was the kind who would have preferred a caterer's product.

It had been Philip who insisted on this home wedding. To Adalyn, this little town in northern New York State, the frame house where she had been born and raised, were only places to which one made reluctant and hurried visits.

The bride-to-be, who was known as New York's most beautiful artists' model and whose face had looked out from a hundred magazine covers, had small sentiment for home.

But Philip was different. Philip liked old-fashioned simplicity. He had been enchanted with the peaceful rustic atmosphere of North Haven the previous summer when he had driven Adalyn up from New York for a visit to her family. He had lingered there for the whole of her stay.

Of course, North Haven had not been the main attraction. Adalyn, ever since her high school days, had drawn men to her like flies to a honey pot. She had boasted a dozen invitations to parties where Sylvie was lucky to receive one. As children they had been known as "that pretty Ferrall girl and her sister."

THE family beauty undoubtedly was Adalyn, with her curls of burnished gold, her deep violet eyes, little straight nose, and small, oval face.

Sylvie's hair was fair, but of a dull ash blond and straight. No amount of crimping or curling could ever make it lie in soft waves. Her eyes were an indeterminate shade between slate and green.

In size and build the sisters were almost identical, although an impartial observer might have preferred Sylvie's slimly rounded figure to the other's angular thinness.

Sylvie, however, bemoaned those few extra pounds which made Adalyn's cast-off clothes just a trifle too tight.

And now she was frosting the cake for Adalyn's wedding to—*the man whom Sylvie herself loved!*

Philip, with his steady, gray eyes and his brown hair tousled like a small boy's, had appealed to Sylvie as a new and fascinating type during his summer visit the year before.

Love had come to her unwilled and unrecognized. Sylvie had been amazed to find herself flushing at a chance exchange of glances, her fingers tingling to smooth his rumpled hair.

But Philip had noticed nothing of the girl's emotion. To him Sylvie was merely Adalyn's sister, a nice, companionable sort and that was all.

It was Adalyn for whom his eyes softened and his warm smile flashed with tender significance. For the first time in her life Sylvie envied her sister.

If the older girl had appreciated his worth, Sylvie could have borne her own disappointment more philosophically; but Adalyn had belittled Philip and talked about a Geoffrey King, "a perfect prince with the most divine car and oodles of money."

"But, of course, Geoff's not a marrying man," the beauty had added thoughtfully. "His mother keeps him tied pretty close to her apron strings."

SYLVIE sighed heavily as she put a last touch of pink on the cake.

Suddenly she heard the shriek of brakes in front of the house. A long, low-slung roadster of foreign make had pulled up at their curb. A man in golf knickers vaulted over the side.

She hurried to the door.

"Is Miss Ferrall at home?" inquired the visitor.

"Which Miss Ferrall?" countered Sylvie, with intentional perversity.

She disliked the man on sight for his thin, dapper elegance, his bold stare, the little waxed mustache which gave him an insolent air.

"Miss Adalyn, of course," he replied a trifle curtly. "Please say Mr. King wishes to see her."

So this was Geoffrey King, whom Adalyn had described as a "prince." There was no accounting for tastes, but why was he here now?

"I'll tell her," Sylvie answered coldly.

She went up the stairs slowly. She felt that this man's presence was a menace to Philip.

"There's a Mr. King downstairs to see you," she informed Adalyn, who was dawdling over her finger nails.

"Geoff King? Here?" Adalyn's voice rose in an excited trill. Her violet eyes lighted as if by an inward spark. "Tell him I'll be right down."

She busied herself with powder and lipstick.

"But are you sure you want to see him?" ventured Sylvie. "What would Philip say?"

"Don't be an old fogy," admonished Adalyn gaily, as she wriggled into a pale yellow sports dress, one of her trousseau gowns. "I'm getting married, you know, but I'm not going into a convent."

Sylvie returned to the kitchen.

A few minutes later she heard the click of Adalyn's high heels on the stairs and her voice cooing, "Geoff, how marvelous! What brought you here?"

The man's answer was inaudible, but presently Adalyn was at the kitchen door, announcing: "I'm going for a little ride with Geoff, to try his new car."

"Philip is coming on the four o'clock train," Sylvie reminded her.

"I'll try to get back in time," conceded Adalyn, "but if I don't," coaxingly, "be an angel and meet him at the station. He'll have that horrid Nickolai with him, anyhow."

She wrinkled her nose, a cute trick.

Adalyn had more than once mentioned with distaste the Russian artist, Nickolai, whom Philip had chosen as best man. Sylvie had gathered that Nickolai was one male who had never succumbed to the model's charms. Consequently, Adalyn hated him.

"Don't count on me," Sylvie warned. "I'm too busy. Besides, Philip will want to see you, not me."

"He'll struggle along for an hour or two without the sunshine of my smile," Adalyn rejoined carelessly, turning from the kitchen.

JUST as the train pulled in, Sylvie rattled up to the depot platform in the family Ford. Her pulse quickened as Philip walked toward her, followed by a dark, slender, foreign-looking man.

"Hello there, Sylvie, old dear!" Philip greeted her cordially, but his eyes looked beyond her. "Where's Adalyn?"

"She couldn't come," Sylvie lied lamely.

"I suppose a girl has a lot of fussing to do at a time like this," Philip admitted indulgently. "Gosh, to-morrow's the big day! I can hardly believe it."

He sounded awed, but very, very happy.

"Miss Ferrall, my sister-to-be, this is Count Nickolai. Igor Chanuris-Anapolski. We call him Nicky for short."

The count bowed in a foreign manner, very deeply. His eyes were fastened on Sylvie in a stare that would

have been rude, but for its abstraction.

"Mees Ferrall," he murmured, with just a trace of accent, "you are a surprise, a delightful surprise. *Vous êtes ravissante.*"

Sylvie looked in bewilderment at Philip, who grinned.

"He says you're a knock-out," he translated rather liberally.

PHILIP was out of the car almost before it stopped at the Ferrall homestead and racing eagerly up the steps of the porch.

"Adalyn!" he shouted.

"She's not here," said Mrs. Ferrall, appearing at the door with an embarrassed air.

"Not here?" Phil was crestfallen

"She'll be here presently," put in Sylvie, with forced brightness. "Come in, both of you, and I'll make a cup of tea while you're waiting."

Nickolai beamed. His dark eyes followed Sylvie while she deftly set out the tea cups. Philip was plainly annoyed over Adalyn's absence.

The girl chatted desperately and somewhat incoherently. Minutes, a half hour, an hour dragged by. Her gaze traveled with increasing frequency to the clock. Where could she be?

Sylvie rose in annoyance and walked to the window, just as Geoff King's big car pulled up at the curb.

Adalyn was back. A queer mingling of relief and disappointment stirred Sylvie.

"Oh, hello, everybody!" A flushed, starry-eyed Adalyn burst into their midst. "So you're here!" She addressed Philip in a flat tone.

"Where else would I be? You were expecting me at four, weren't you?" demanded Philip, glowering at the man who was trailing on Adalyn's heels.

Geoff cleared his throat, sheepishly.

"Oh, yes," replied Adalyn lightly, "but I just couldn't make it. We were having such a glorious ride."

"YOU mean you deliberately left me to go riding with that—" Philip bellowed in righteous wrath.

"How *dare* you talk to me like that?" interrupted the girl, with a pretty imperiousness.

"I'll talk to you any way I please," flared Philip. "You can't pull any two-timing on me."

"You cad!" the girl flung back.

Nickolai, interpreting the storm signals, remarked: "If you don't mind, I'm going outside to get a breath of fresh air."

"Wait!" Adalyn stopped him. "You might as well see the finish of this."

"But, Adalyn," began Philip, startled and apologetic, "let's not quarrel."

"It's no use." Adalyn ignored his entreaty. "You've shown what kind of husband you would be, Philip—a bully—a brute!"

Sylvie, who knew her sister well, surprised a calculating gleam under Adalyn's long, gold-tipped lashes. She suspected that the girl was acting and had created this scene for purposes of her own.

"You've always been cuckoo about that knock-kneed mama's boy!" Philip pointed an accusing finger at the now scarlet Geoff.

"Yes? Well, he's more of a gentleman than *you* will ever be!" Adalyn screamed. Her anger was real now, and she cast pretense to the winds. "If you want the truth, you can have it. Geoff's the man I love, the man I'm going to marry. Take your old ring."

A solitaire flashed at Philip's feet.

He picked it up dazedly. His face was like white parchment. Sylvie's heart contracted as he turned to her unexpectedly with the expression of a small, hurt boy.

"You *can't* do this!" she cried to her sister. "You—you—"

"Well, say it!" flamed the older girl. "Marry him yourself. You'd like to. I've seen the way you moon around about him."

Sylvie's face burned. She tried to speak, but words choked in her throat.

"WAIT for me in the car," Adalyn ordered Geoff. "I'll get my bag and be with you in a minute."

She started from the room.

"Adalyn!"

Philip's stricken voice called to her, but she ascended the stairs unheeding. He dropped to the davenport and covered his face with his hands.

Sylvie watched her sister's exit in paralyzed dismay. The flush had faded from her cheeks, leaving her very white. Mrs. Ferrall was crying softly.

Sylvie was the first to recover herself.

"I'll try to stop her," she whispered to the crushed Philip, and followed Adalyn on flying feet.

The girl, tossing garments wildly into a suitcase, raised hostile eyes at Sylvie's entrance.

"Save your breath," she advised. "I'm going with Geoff!" There was a little note of triumph in her voice. "I've always been crazy about Geoff, but I thought he wasn't the marrying sort. I guess," with a little excited laugh, "he woke up when he found he was going to lose me, so he drove up here as fast as he could and popped the question."

"But why not wait? Think it over —the guests—" suggested Sylvie, hopeless before the other's fiery determination.

"Nothing doing!" Adalyn shook her gleaming curls decisively. "I'm taking no chances. Geoff might get cold feet if I waited. He's taking me back to New York to-night. He'll wire his mother and as soon as the old lady can get down from Southampton we'll be married." She snapped her bag shut with an air of finality. "Don't be cross, sis. You'll have a lot of fun consoling Philip."

She laughed mischievously and was gone with a gay, "So long!" The front door closed behind her.

SYLVIE proceeded toward the living room slowly. She dreaded, yet longed, to see Philip. Dreaded the sight of his suffering, yet yearned to comfort him. Nickolai met her at the door.

"See if you can talk to him," he entreated excitedly. "My poor Phileep, he think his heart is broken. He will listen to nothing I say. That stupid, cruel girl—" he broke off quickly. "Forgive me! I forget. She is your sister."

"I will see what I can do," Sylvie promised, and went to Philip.

He was sitting where she had left him, in one corner of the davenport. His rumpled brown head was bowed in his hands.

"Philip!" Sylvie's voice breathed his name like a caress.

He lifted pain-dulled eyes to hers, but said nothing. A great wave of pity and tenderness swept the girl. She forgot everything except the man and his suffering. In a flash she was at his side.

"Philip, Philip, you poor dear boy! I'm *so* sorry," she murmured.

The crooning softness of her voice penetrated Philip's dumb misery. He turned to her as naturally as a child to its mother and let his head drop to her lap.

"Oh, Sylvie," he cried brokenly, "how could she? And I loved her. I tried to be good to her."

His voice died away in a hoarse whisper.

Sylvie wanted to draw him to her breast, to kiss away his hurt, but contented herself with smoothing his hair. For a long time they sat thus.

"I shouldn't bother you like this with my troubles," Philip said appreciatively.

"No, I understand," Sylvie assured him.

The pressure of his head against her knees was an aching sweetness. She wished that he need never move, but Philip had already shaken off her restraining hands. He straightened himself, a little ashamed and embarrassed.

"It's just the shock, I guess." He tried to explain his momentary weakness. "If she had told me a month, even a week, ago that everything was all off, it would have hurt like the devil, of course, but not this way. She played me for a fool."

A note of anger crept into his voice.

"A nice position this puts me in, after telling everybody I was coming to North Haven to get married. Left at the church!"

He grinned bitterly.

"Don't talk like that, Philip," begged Sylvie.

"It's true," he returned harshly. "It's what all my friends will say."

He paced the floor.

"Nicky knew," Philip went on. "He always said she was selfish. But I believed in her. I thought there was a real woman behind that pretty face. I loved her. It was my paintings which brought her fame. And now—"

He paused for breath and scowled fiercely at Sylvie as if blaming her for Adalyn's misdeeds.

"I'LL never have the nerve to go back to New York without a bride," he groaned. "Lord, if only—"

He stopped his frenzied pacing and stared hard at Sylvie.

"What is it?" she faltered. The intensity of his gaze alarmed her.

"If only I had a bride to take back with me! I'd turn the tables on her then. Serve her right, too!" he muttered, without removing his eyes from the girl's face. "She suggested it herself."

Sylvie thought he must be going mad. She rose from her seat uncertainly.

Philip pushed her back.

"Wait!" he commanded. "Sylvie, you remember what Adalyn said—about you—liking me—marrying me?"

"She didn't know what she was saying," protested the girl wildly.

"But you do like me, don't you?" he persisted, with unconscious cruelty. "I've thought sometimes—I know this sounds conceited—only I've got to know. Couldn't you like me well enough to marry me?"

"Now you *are* insane!" cried the girl.

"I was never more sane in my life," Philip assured her. "I need a wife to take back to New York with me, Sylvie. I'm asking you to marry me."

The room whirled dizzily around Sylvie. She doubted her own senses. Philip was asking her to be his wife!

She had dreamed once of hearing such words on his lips, but never under circumstances like these.

She could not delude herself. He wanted her because she was the most convenient girl—to save his face.

"No, Philip!" She made her refusal sharp, as much for her own benefit as his. "It's impossible!"

"Why?" he argued. "Is there any one else you care for, Sylvie?"

She shook her head. How could there be, when all her hopes and dreams had been centered about this one man?

"I'LL ask nothing of you, Sylvie, except that you bear my name and let me introduce you as my wife," he urged. "I'll try to make you happy, my dear. There'll be advantages on your side, too. New York, travel, luxury of a sort—"

Sylvie looked at him in tender exasperation.

"You dear, blundering idiot," she wanted to cry, "what do your money, your position, your gifts mean to me? Can't you see it's *you* I want?"

Aloud she repeated, "It's impossible," but her tone was less firm. She was tempted. To be near him, to see him daily, to do him small services—these privileges would be hers if she agreed to this mad marriage.

Philip sensed her weakening. He reached out his hands and took hers tightly.

"Say yes," he entreated.

Almost against her will, the girl nodded.

"You are very good and very kind," he told her gratefully.

Sylvie looked away lest he see the tears that flooded her eyes. He had called her "good and kind," when she longed to hear such words as "lovely" and "adorable."

"We'll be married to-night," Philip declared. "The sooner the better. We'll beat Adalyn at her own game."

The girl stirred uneasily, but he gave her no chance to change her mind.

"Come on," he urged, "let's find Nicky and tell him we're going to need him for best man after all."

"I THINK we'd better take Nicky with us on the—the—er—honeymoon. I'll need him," Philip said, immediately after the ceremony.

A shadow of a grin twitched his mouth.

"Yes, let's," she agreed in dismay. A third might prove a welcome buffer during their first weeks of loveless married life.

Nicky proved himself an invaluable traveling companion. It was he who wired ahead to the Château Frontenac at Quebec for rooms, he who sent out the wedding announcements, he who piloted Sylvie about the quaint old French-Canadian town.

Philip, after the excitement had left him, relapsed into gloom and willingly permitted his friend to serve as escort to his bride.

Sylvie had been prepared for indifference from her new husband, but not for the hurt which it gave her.

"Run along and have a good time," he would say in his pleasant, disinterested manner.

He consigned his wife to Nicky as easily as he would have loaned an old, well insured car. She and the Russian might take one hour or five for their sight-seeing jaunts, but Philip never questioned.

"He's sure no one would want me," thought Sylvie resentfully, "and he's probably right."

Yet she noticed the way Nicky's eyes softened whenever they rested on her. There was something in the Russian's regard which warned her. She was frightened, but secretly thrilled.

The first ten days of the honeymoon had passed when Philip suggested that they return to New York.

"This trip is a beastly nuisance anyhow," he asserted, "and I've got a lot of work to do."

A slightly hysterical laugh burst from Sylvie. Her husband was bored on their "honeymoon"!

"You are not very gallant, Phileep," chided Nicky.

"Oh, Sylvie understands," returned the other impatiently. "No use pretending."

"No use pretending!" thought the girl.

Her whole life was a pretense. She simulated a calm friendliness while every fiber of her being yearned for this man. She feigned unconcern to the hurts which he administered unknowingly. She was not sorry to see the mockery of the honeymoon end.

It was arranged that they would settle in Philip's one-time bachelor apartment.

"There are plenty of rooms, and you can have a couple done over for yourself," Philip told her. "I was planning to have it redecorated for—" He paused a second. "And that reminds me, you'll want some new clothes. Nicky said something yesterday about a friend of his, a modiste, who would be glad to outfit you."

Of course, it was Nicky who had observed the deficiencies in her wardrobe. Philip's unseeing eyes would never have noticed.

THE odd honeymoon trio returned that night to New York. Sylvie was lonely as she said "Good-by" to Nicky, and headed with Philip for—home. A home without love!

At the apartment a letter was awaiting her. She saw Philip catch his breath as he glimpsed the writing on the envelope. It was from Adalyn.

She wrote:

> You didn't waste any time, did you, old dear? Well, I suppose it's up to me to wish you good luck. Here's hoping you can return the compliment soon.
>
> We're up in Southampton: Geoff, his mother, and yours truly. My mamma-to-be decided that we must be married from the ancestral estate, as soon as her neuritis or indigestion, I've forgotten which, is better.
>
> I think her sickness is a stall. She doesn't seem to enthuse over me. She has some deb with a million bucks and protruding teeth picked for the future Mrs. Geoffrey King. But I've got my own ideas on that subject. Just let Geoff try to pull something after the way he busted up my wedding and deprived me of one perfectly good husband.

Sylvie looked up to find Philip regarding the letter hungrily. He wanted to read it, to hear the news of Adalyn. So she gave it to him.

Next morning brought her introduction to the modiste, Nicky's friend. One gown, among the glittering, gay number Madame Barinoff maintained was made just for her. And—

As the modiste had anticipated, the dress had the blond sheen of her hair, and by its very neutrality of coloring made her skin and eyes seem luminous. Gardenia white and slimly rounded, her exquisite shoulders rose from the low-cut bodice.

"Why, it makes me almost beautiful!" she whispered to herself. She grew accustomed to the new straight, smooth haircut (achieved that morning) on prolonged observation, and realized dimly that it gave a seductive outline to her face.

With half closed eyes, Nicky feasted upon her newly revealed loveliness. His

rapt gaze swept her from head to toe with an ardor that sent swift color to Sylvie's face.

"There's only one thing needed to complete that gown," he murmured.

Nicky conducted her home and extended his invitation to Philip in person.

"Sure thing," the latter accepted. "Glad to come."

She sat still for what seemed an eternity, while Nicky worked like one possessed

"Yes?" doubtfully from Sylvie. It seemed impossible that anything could add to the wonderful dress.

"I will show you later the perfecting touch," he promised. Then, changing the subject, "You will dine with me to-night, you and Phileep, and you will wear this dress?"

"If Philip wishes," agreed the girl.

He was always glad to avoid *tête-à-tête* dinners with his bride.

Sylvie dressed for the occasion in a tremor of excitement. She took unusual care with each detail of her toilette, brushing the new bob to shining smoothness, burnishing her nails, touching her lips with scarlet.

What would Philip say? Would he

notice her changed appearance? After a final survey before her mirror, she dashed to his studio.

Philip, absorbed in a magazine, did not glance up at her entrance, but read on until distracted by her restless movements.

"Well, well!" he observed, looking up in the detached fashion that he reserved for his wife, "a new dress, eh? Not bad, but rather short on material, isn't it?" with a significant glance at her exposed back and shoulders. He returned to his magazine.

Sylvie bit her lip to keep back the tears.

NICKY'S rhapsodies on their arrival at his apartment contrasted cruelly with her husband's lukewarm approval.

"And now," declared the Russian, "I shall supply the completing touch to Sylvie's gown."

He strode over and picked up a box of antique brass from the mantel place. Both Sylvie and Philip watched in growing curiosity while he lifted the lid ceremoniously.

"Oh, how beautiful!" An involuntary exclamation of delight broke from Sylvie as he drew forth a string of green fire.

"Family jewels saved from the Russian revolution," he explained as he clasped the emerald rope about her throat. "Yours, my dear Sylvie," he offered with a little formal bow.

"But I can't take these, Nicky," the girl said wistfully. "They must be worth a fortune."

She turned to Philip.

"It's darned nice of you, Nicky." Sylvie was relieved to hear her husband speak up. "Mighty generous and all that, but Sylvie's right. She couldn't accept such an expensive gift."

"Sylvie shall pay me by sitting for a portrait," the count announced. "I shall exchange the emeralds for a masterpiece."

"You want to paint Sylvie?" exclaimed Philip in surprise.

"Yes. She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," the Russian explained. "Look! As she stands there now, is she not glorious? May I paint her portrait?"

"Of course," answered Philip with a trace of impatience, "if Sylvie wants to sit for you."

Nicky's beseeching gaze turned to the girl, who nodded.

"It will be hard work, Sylvie," he warned, "because I shall use you many hours each day. I must finish the picture in time for my exhibition, and that is only six weeks away."

"FUNNY duck, that Nickolai," observed Philip as they returned home that evening. "You sure have made a hit with the boy. Wonder how much those stones are worth, anyhow?"

He leaned over and idly fingered the emeralds which Nicky had refused to take back.

By accident his hand touched the girl's neck. A quiver of flame shot through Sylvie.

She locked her fingers tight in her lap lest she throw herself into the arms of this strange, unmoved man she called her husband. He would be surprised, undoubtedly annoyed by such a gesture.

No man even remotely interested in a woman could stand by undisturbed while another lavished her with compliments and jewels.

The next morning Sylvie went early to Nicky's studio for her first sitting.

By daylight the situation seemed unreal and farcical. She felt almost im-

modest in the low-cut gown which she donned in a little dressing room adjoining the artist's studio.

Sylvie tried several poses before Nicky cried, "That's it! Don't move now."

She sat still for what seemed an eternity, while Nicky worked like one possessed. With a brush in his hand and a canvas before him, he became a different being, almost inhuman. As a woman she had ceased to exist for him. He saw her only as a symbol of beauty to be re-created in pigment.

Numbness assailed her body. She grew light-headed from fatigue and strain, and swayed a trifle.

"Sylvie, I'm sorry." Nicky was contrite as he saw her waver. "I forget you become tired."

He hovered over her, a glass of water in one hand, as deliberately he steadied her with the other. The action was a natural one, but Sylvie sensed danger.

"I'm all right," she said, with an uneasy laugh.

She could not doubt that he recognized her now as a woman, and a very desirable one.

She returned home tormented by a vague sense of disloyalty. An impulse to confession stirred her.

PHILIP was seated before a canvas, his usually pleasant face twisted into a scowl. Sylvie coughed nervously.

"What! Back so soon?" he asked.

"I was gone a long time," she said, scrutinizing.

She gave a little start. Philip was painting her sister's face, using an old magazine illustration as a model.

"One of a series of covers," he stated briefly, his face flushing. "I finished six before—" He blundered on confusedly, "but there are four left and the editor who gave me the order wants the same model." He avoided speaking Adalyn's name.

"I see, of course!" Sylvie left the room hastily.

After that the days settled into a routine for Sylvie. An early breakfast, with Philip concealed behind his morning paper, long hours posing for Nicky, and a hurried return to supervise the dinner preparations.

She noticed that he was becoming less moody and bitter. Perhaps he was forgetting! whispered hope. His eyes had lost the hurt, unhappy look which had so tortured his wife during those honeymoon days in Quebec.

At times he talked to her in a friendly, almost gay fashion and seemed to enjoy rather than dread evenings alone with her.

ONE day, returning from Nicky's studio, she stopped in the hallway, transfixed by the sound of a shrill, sweet, feminine voice.

Adalyn! She could not be mistaken. Adalyn conversing with the maid, who had just explained that: "Mistah Philip will not return until dinner."

Sylvie hurried to her sister.

"Hello, darling," drawled Adalyn, who was lolling on a divan, perfectly at ease.

The audacity of her coming here to Philip's home! thought Sylvie. She returned the greeting stiffly.

"You're looking rather well," Adalyn observed, "but you don't seem particularly glad to see me."

"I'm surprised, that's all," Sylvie answered.

Adalyn laughed mockingly.

"I hear that you're sitting for Nickolai's latest masterpiece. They say he's plenty That Way about you."

"Who says so?" Sylvie demanded.

"Oh, everybody," the other girl responded with an inclusive gesture. "I've been around the studios trying to get some modeling to do, and I hear things."

"But I thought you were going to be married?"

"So did I," admitted Adalyn, "but Mamma King had a heart attack and sonny boy Geoff can't throw any wedding parties until she gets well. I myself think the old lady's a big fake. She isn't any sicker than I am, but she sure has Geoff buffaloed."

The tone was sullen and Sylvie noticed for the first time the faint lines of worry etched about her sister's eyes.

"I might not get married after all," added the girl sulkily. "If you hadn't rushed in and grabbed off Philip, perhaps we could have fixed things up."

"Adalyn, you ought to be ashamed to talk that way!" The cry was torn from Sylvie's very heart.

"Don't worry," mocked the other. "I'm not after him. All I want now is dough, and I think Philip needs me as a model."

"He wouldn't consider such a thing, under the circumstances," cried Philip's wife.

"Think so?" confidently came from Adalyn. "Watch me do my stuff."

FACE to face with Adalyn's flamboyant beauty, the younger girl felt awkward and ugly. She became once more the "sister of that pretty Ferrall girl."

The outer door of the apartment slammed noisily. A moment later Philip entered the room, staring at Adalyn as if at an apparition.

Adalyn broke the silence.

"You're not a very cordial host, Philip."

He swallowed hard. Speech seemed to have deserted him.

"Don't tell me you're still cross," Adalyn coaxed in her most dulcet tones.

"Adalyn wants to see you about some modeling," Sylvie put in curtly. She was nauseated at the spectacle of her sister "doing her stuff" with Philip. "If you'll excuse me, I must talk to cook about dinner."

Adalyn's triumphant smile and Philip's blank gaze followed her as she escaped from the room.

Tears stung her eyelids, but she dried them fiercely. She could not, she *must not* cry. Face down on her own bed, she lay very still. Once she laughed hysterically at the crumbling of her fragile hopes.

A rap on her bedroom door aroused her from mute agony.

"Mistah Philip wants to see you, ma'am," said the maid servant.

Sylvie rose reluctantly and dusted her nose with powder. As she approached the living room, she could hear mingled voices.

"Don't be ridic, Phil," Adalyn was saying with a trace of impatience. "She'll never object. How could she, under the circumstances? Nickolai—"

"Now, Adalyn," Philip cut in, "don't start that again."

"YOU wanted me, Philip?" Sylvie's low, steady voice broke into the discussion.

"It's like this," Adalyn explained. "He wants me to model for him, but he thinks he should ask you first."

Philip frowned.

"I'm not asking permission," he said stiffly. "I'm merely consulting your wishes, Sylvie. As you know, I've been unable to finish that series of covers featuring Adalyn. Copying from a picture is unsatisfactory—"

Then the beauty had won! Adalyn smiled in triumph.

Sylvie answered coldly: "Certainly, Philip, why shouldn't Adalyn model for you?"

"Then you don't mind?"

"No, surely not."

It was arranged that Adalyn would begin work immediately.

Sylvie went to Nicky's studio the next morning, heavy-hearted with the knowledge that her husband was painting the beautiful face of the girl he loved. Adalyn's easy victory had proved that the old affection still flamed in his heart.

Nicky noticed at once the change in his sitter.

"Yesterday you were radiant," he said. "To-day you seem unhappy." He searched her face gently. "Sylvie, what is it? Why are you sad?"

His sympathy, the softness of his voice moved the girl. Long-repressed tears flooded her eyes.

"Sylvie, Sylvie, my beautiful!" Nicky was at her side. "You are breaking my heart. Don't you know I love you, that I suffer when you suffer? Sylvie, my darling!"

He crushed her to him.

"DON'T! You mustn't!" Sylvie fought against the embrace. White-faced and accusing she confronted the Russian.

"You—Philip's best friend—you, make love to his wife!" she whispered in horror.

"Phileep is my friend," acknowledged Nicky unashamed, "but you, Sylvie, are the woman I love. When you were happy, I say nothing, but to-day you are sad and I can speak. Phileep is not longer my friend when he brings the clouds to your face."

"You don't know what you're saying," cried the girl. "Philip is not to blame. He's everything that's fine and wonderful."

"But—" Nicky was bewildered.

"I never want to see you again," declared Sylvie, still angrily defensive. "I'm going now and I'm never coming back!" She moved toward the door.

"Wait!" Nicky entreated. "The picture is not finished. You cannot go now!"

Sylvie paused. The soul of an artist was pleading.

"My masterpiece, it will be ruined if you leave me. I forget myself — I promise—I will not offend again." His words were tumbling out incoherently. "Only two weeks more and we will be finished—"

"I'll stay."

Sylvie saw that his contrition was genuine, and took pity. Furthermore, those daily sittings gave her a chance to flee the apartment where Adalyn's presence tortured her.

MORE and more Sylvie felt herself an intruder in her own home. If she had not, as Adalyn put it crudely, grabbed Philip, he would have been free to woo again the girl he loved.

The day came at last when Nicky laid down his brush.

"It is finished," he declared, and stood in rapt contemplation of his work.

"May I see it?" questioned Sylvie.

"To-morrow," answered Nicky. "I shall have a little tea, a pre-view for you and Phileep."

Next day the bride and groom went to Nicky's studio. The Russian greeted them excitedly. He was alone and the portrait stood at one end of the room, covered with a heavy velvet curtain.

"Now!" he announced, and drew them forward.

With an air of reverence, he approached the easel and manipulated a pulley that parted the velvet curtain.

"But that isn't me!"

The exclamation was Sylvie's. It seemed impossible that this lovely, seductive woman who looked out of the canvas with eyes of a green fire that matched the painted emeralds, could be herself!

"Yes, it's you," Philip answered heavily. He looked at the portrait for a long time. "A great piece of work," he added in a curiously flat voice.

THEY taxied home in a strained, uncomfortable silence. Philip spoke only once.

"I suppose you'll miss your sittings now that the picture is finished."

"Why, yes," returned Sylvie frankly. "I'll probably be a frightful nuisance to you, hanging around all day."

Adalyn was waiting for them at the door. Sylvie was surprised to see that the flawless beauty of her sister's face was distorted by anger.

"Look!" The girl thrust a newspaper at Philip.

Sylvie peered over his shoulder at a photograph showing Geoffrey King, accompanied by a girl with prominent teeth. Above it was the caption: "Millionaire Sportsman to Wed Society Heiress."

"The old lady got her way after all," wailed Adalyn. Sobs of self-pity choked her and she ran from the room.

Philip looked stupefied. He seemed incapable of movement.

"Go to her," Sylvie advised gently.

He must be aching to comfort the girl he loved. Only the fetters of their hasty, unwise marriage were holding him back.

He turned once, almost appealingly, but Sylvie motioned him forward with a peremptory gesture. In his stumbling hesitation she could see a conflict between love and duty.

She heard him close the studio door. He was alone with Adalyn.

WITH quick, sure steps Sylvie sought her own room. She had made her decision. Philip must be given his freedom to find happiness with the girl of his choice.

A spirit of sacrifice buoyed the tearful bride. Another love would be a logical explanation for her departure, and Philip would not be tormented by regrets.

Nicky! He was the solution! Resolutely Sylvie seated herself at her small rosewood desk and wrote:

DEAR PHILIP:

I'm leaving to-night—for good. This will surprise, but should not grieve you. Our marriage has been a mistake from the first: for you, and for me as well. I know it now. I love—perhaps you can guess whom. This love makes it impossible for me to keep up our pretense any longer. You will understand, I am sure, and will seek some quiet way out of the entanglement.

Always your friend,

SYLVIE.

She had not mentioned Nicky's name, but Philip would have no difficulty in guessing her supposed love.

Then in a deliberate, trance-like fashion, she filled a small traveling bag and went over to Nicky's studio.

The Russian himself opened the door.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he exclaimed. "But is anything wrong?"

He looked at Sylvie's white, drawn face.

"Everything is wrong," replied the girl, "and I'm so tired."

NICKY led the visitor into his studio. With tender solicitude he removed her wraps and seated her in an easy chair before the fireplace.

Sylvie stared into the dancing flames which dispelled the chill of the fall evening. Now that she was here, she found it hard to word her request.

In halting sentences, she poured out her story, parts of which Nicky already knew.

"So you see," she finished, "I've got to free him, and this is the best way. You don't mind, do you, if I pretend to be in love with you?"

Nicky did not answer at once, but rose and walked the room, lighting cigarette after cigarette, which he tossed away absently.

"If I agree to this game of pretend," he asked, "will you try some day—later—to make it a reality? Could you learn to love me, Sylvie?"

"I don't know, Nicky," answered the girl doubtfully. "I'll try, but—"

"Love doesn't come at will." He finished the sentence for her.

"I'll go to North Haven to-night and let Philip think that I'm waiting there until the—the divorce." She stumbled a little at the hated word. "If he thinks I'm in love with you, he won't worry about me or feel mean and disloyal. I do want him to be happy."

"You love him as much as that?" the man asked reverently.

She nodded. "And you'll help me?"

"I'd do anything to make you happy, Sylvie," he replied.

"You're sweet, Nicky," the girl said gratefully. "I'll go now. There's a train for North Haven to-night."

"No, not yet," commanded Nicky. "Wait here about fifteen minutes. There are several things I must do."

Sylvie lost track of time as she stared at the flickering fire, seeing only Philip's face, his tousled brown head, his gray eyes. Memories—that was all she had left! She was sobbing softly.

A DOOR opened behind her. Nicky, no doubt, had come back to take her to the train. Sylvie looked around. It was Philip!

"Why are you here?" she whispered. Where's Adalyn?"

"Adalyn?" repeated Philip. "Oh, she's getting married, I guess," he asserted in a matter-of-fact tone. "Geoff came around just after you'd left. It seems that his mother tried to slip over this society engagement, but it didn't work. I was glad to see her go."

Sylvia stared, uncomprehending. "But I thought—"

For a split second Philip said nothing. Then his eyes crinkled in the old friendly smile she loved.

"You thought a lot of things," he said gently, "and most of them were wrong. I was wrong, too, terribly wrong. And because of that I nearly lost you, precious darling!"

He kissed her again and again.

"I must have loved you always," he said humbly, "but like a fool, I didn't realize it until to-night. When I got your note, I nearly went crazy." They clung to each other as he continued: "And then Nicky telephoned—"

"Nicky?" murmured Sylvie.

"Yes," Philip explained. "He said you were here, and your note was just a bluff. It was darned white of him."

Only Sylvie knew how white it had been.

"Shall we go home now, darling?" Philip asked.

"Yes," she said. "*Home!*"

Into the water she went. Willing hands reached for her

Forced to Love

The primitive villagers cried shame when she nursed him back to health alone. Could she tell him of her predicament and their threats?

By Jane Littell

Author of "New Year and New Love"

ELISE LAWTON had been dreaming of other days, happier days, another sort of life entirely—but principally of John Denning—when her father and Peter Ort stamped up onto the porch, brushed the snow from their boots, and brought a breath of pine scented air into the room.

And because she had been dreaming of John Denning the sight of Pete Ort was an even greater shock, although he didn't have to be compared with the slim, laughing, blue-eyed John to be a shock to any fastidious girl.

Elise's greatest trouble was that she didn't belong in the North Country. She belonged back in that old life—of dances and parties and frivolous talk and gay banter. And her greatest sorrow was that life was leaving her behind. Here she was, twenty-two years old, isolated in the north woods, and love and life were passing her by.

Life and love—and John Denning. She was sure there would have been

something very sweet and tender between her and John. He was her kind.

But there was her father, growing well and strong and gay again after his terrible illness. Wasn't she being selfish even to think of herself, when it was the very isolation she was coming to hate that had saved his life?

"Why, thanks, Pete," she heard her father say, as he stood beside the table inspecting Pete's third gift of rabbits, all cleaned and ready to cook. "Stay and share them with us. Elise certainly does know how to cook rabbit."

"Don't care if I do," agreed Pete, settling down with his evil smelling pipe and directing a meaning glance at the girl. "I'm savin' the skins for a blanket, Elise. Got almost enough now."

And then it was that Elise realized, with a shock that stunned her and a shiver of distaste she could not hide, that Pete was courting her! Pete Ort! Courting her after the fashion of the north country. Oh, why hadn't she realized it before her father had accepted the third gift of rabbits?

Pete's words terrified her. When a north country man hinted that he was about to present a girl with a fur blanket, it was serious. It meant that he had chosen her for his wife—and north country men were too primitive to take no for an answer. Without revenge!

Something had to be done. She couldn't let Pete ask her to marry him. Why, she couldn't bear the sight of him! His heavy features, the clumsiness of him that made his bull-like strength almost comic, his leering eyes and evil, insinuating smile, all combined to make the man as hideously repulsive as a monster.

At first she knew a wild desire to laugh hysterically. Just because they had spent two winters in the north woods, just because her father had hired Pete and worked with him day after day—Pete was presuming an equality that was too ridiculous.

He wouldn't have dared raise his eyes to Elise if she had been merely a summer visitor. And that was the class to which she and her father belonged. They were city people who had been forced by her father's health to live in the north—forced by the state of their finances to join the fishing industry that supported the community. But they were the aristocrats of that industry, for Elise's father owned the biggest fishing boats on the lake.

Something had to be done instantly.

"Why don't you sell the skins, Pete?" she suggested desperately. "Fur robes are terribly hard to take care of. Moths get into them—"

She didn't have to finish her statement, for Pete was glaring at her with malevolent intensity. Her father, as startled as the girl herself at the discovery of Pete's matrimonial intentions, sat tensely awaiting developments.

"You mean—you don't want it?" Pete demanded belligerently.

"I wouldn't have a fur blanket in the house," Elise said firmly. "They are not healthy. You never can clean them."

She wondered if she could successfully pretend ignorance of the north woods engagement gift of a fur blanket.

"Well," said Pete with a leer, "they's them that likes 'em."

THAT episode marked Pete's last visit to the Lawton home, and thereafter Elise stayed away from the fish house, where the repairing of nets and rigging in preparation

for the spring fishing season kept Pete and her father busy during the short winter days. Hence her path and Pet .'s rarely crossed, since she did not mingle with the villagers.

But after Pete's departure that night Elise and her father had a little heart to heart talk.

"I've been selfish, daughter," said Albert Lawton ruefully. "Until tonight I hadn't realized what it means to a girl of your age to be shut away from young people. It's time for you to be thinking of marrying—and so I must take you back where you belong. When the whitefish season is over, I'll sell the boat and the fish house—"

"Not till the doctor says you may go back, daddy," she told him swiftly. "I'm young. What 're a few years out of my life?"

"Tragedy—at your age," said her father quietly. "I realize it, whether you do or not. My life is nearly over. Yours is just begun, and I'm sacrificing that beginning—"

"Hush!" commanded Elise swiftly. "I love the woods and the water—"

But Albert Lawton never solved the problem of his daughter's future. Lake Michigan, inscrutable mistress of the fate of fishermen, did that for him. The Great Lakes, like the sea, exert a siren call. That same siren call that had brought Albert Lawton to blue water for healing brought John Denning.

ON a sharp March day that was brilliant with the promise of coming spring, there appeared upon the boardwalk that borders the river running through the village—that boardwalk that is dock and shipping platform for the fish houses that are the village's commercial district—a tall, blue-eyed, slim and aristocratic looking stranger. John Denning. He was asking for work. Any kind of work that would keep him near water.

He looked out of place in that community of carelessly dressed men. He wore mahogany colored boots that still retained evidences of careful polishing; perfectly tailored trousers that were of army cut and color; and a leather coat with a fur collar that spelled money.

Any one who had ever been near an army post or a flying field would have spotted that costume instantly. Albert Lawton did. The rest of the fishermen supposed Denning was one of the early vanguard of summer resorters, and they laughed at his request for work.

Because he had never cleaned a fish, never planted a net, never navigated the stormy water, the fishermen laughed at him. All but Albert Lawton. Elise's father hired him as a helper in addition to Pete Ort, invited him to live in his own home and set about teaching him the rudiments of the fishing business in preparation for the trout and whitefish season that opened May 1.

Albert took the stranger into his family because of the stunned, unbelieving look on Elise's face when she saw him.

She had been on the street when John—a knapsack over his shoulder—had dropped off the rear end of a truck. He headed straight for the fish houses, and she followed, unable to believe her eyes. Her father knew, the instant he saw her face. Her eyes were like those of a charmed bird.

Peter Ort was furious. When Lawton had hired him he had hinted broadly and ineffectually that he would like to be taken into the Lawton home as a boarder. Pete was shrewd enough, even if he was slow witted, and he

knew very well that the man who married Elise Lawton would automatically become a partner in Lawton's profitable business.

There was no need of a second helper on the fish boat, and Pete was sure that Lawton intended to train the new man, and then dispense with his (Pete's) services. He prepared in advance for his revenge by talking.

He let it be known that the rabbit skin blanket he was working on was intended for Elise. He took on the air of an injured and outraged lover. He hinted at the sort of things a man of his type would hint at, until the village of a hundred and fifty people stood solidly with him against the interloper. A few of them even ventured to speak to Lawton, but he said only:

"Yes, Pete hinted to Elise that he was going to offer her his rabbit skin blanket. And Elise told him that she wouldn't have a fur blanket in the house. That's all there is to that."

Through it all John went quietly about his business. His long, slim hands soon learned the trick of repairing torn nets. His slender arms acquired a new, wiry strength, and his smiling willingness to be useful compensated for his disinclination to run the boat's engine.

Lawton wondered at his instinctive avoidance of any work connected with the engine, but he sensed a mystery and assigned the newcomer to other tasks, while Pete was made responsible for the boat and its motor. Nor did he ask John to explain himself, although Elise had whispered to him all she knew. All John had to say for himself he said that first day.

"I—was in an accident. I need a year of wind and blue water. I am very fortunate in falling in with people of my own kind. I met Elise at the dances at McCook Field."

When it was evident that he had no more to add, Lawton said:

"You came to the right place, boy. Plenty of wind and water here."

Denning thanked him with such an understanding, grateful smile that Lawton was willing to let further explanations come in their own good time.

THEY were a happy household. There was a trembling, luminous something about the girl those days that sometimes brought a mist of emotion to her father's eyes. Why, he wondered, didn't John see it, too? Why didn't he realize that fate was behind his choosing of that little Michigan fishing village for his convalescence?

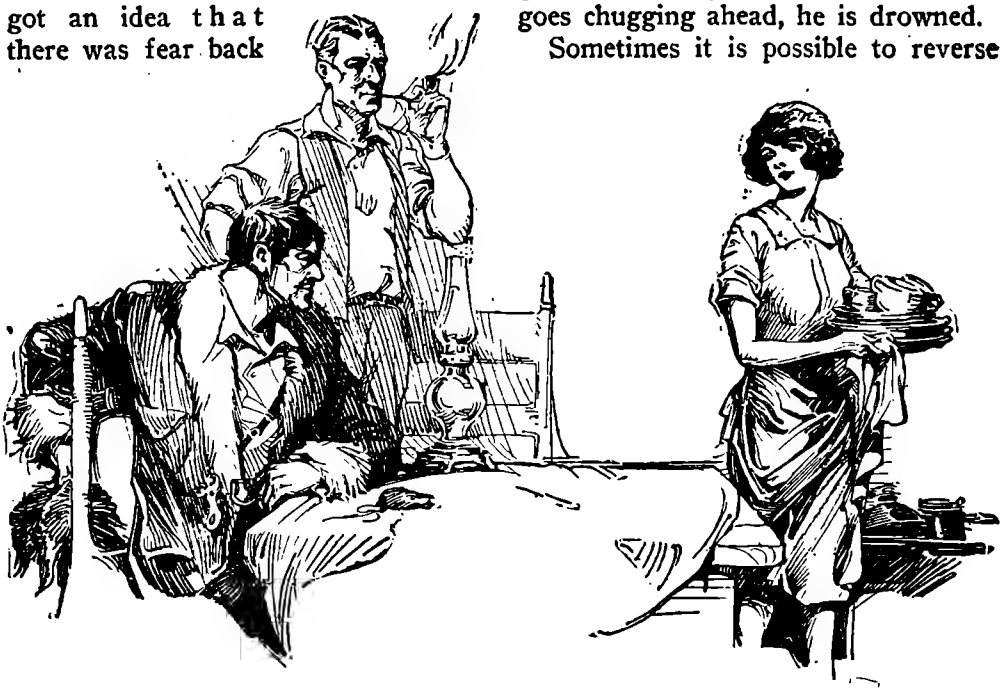
The villagers sensed something, and were soon saying that Lawton wanted his daughter and the stranger to make a match of it, in spite of Pete's having spoken for her first.

As for John, he took up his acquaintance with Elise where he had left it off back there at McCook Field, but he didn't advance it any. As winter merged into spring and Elise foraged through the woods for luscious spongy mushrooms, called Morrelles, that are found beneath last year's leaves, the tall, slim man often joined her, totally unaware of the local convention that a man who "walks out" with a girl wants to marry her. When Elise scoured the woods for unusual wild flowers to transplant to her garden, John carried her basket and trowel. And the villagers began to ask openly when they would be married.

But John Denning said never a word about marriage. His attitude was sweet and friendly, and a little reserved. Entirely untinged by any trace of love-making. When he talked, it

was usually about the first day of May, when the little fish boat would make its first seventeen mile trip out into Lake Michigan to plant its mile-long nets on the far side of North Island.

Somehow Elise got an idea that there was fear back



"You mean you refuse?" he demanded

of John's continued anticipation of that trip. Could it be that he was afraid of the water? If he were, why did he chose to work upon it? There was plenty of danger. "Death by drowning!" How many of the stones in the little local cemetery were so marked!

Death by drowning is not unusual in a little community where the only industry is deep water fishing. Lake Michigan can be a treacherous and storm-tossed expanse of water. It can provide waves, too. Vicious, irregular waves, that pick up the stern of a sturdy fish boat unexpectedly and fling it around in a half circle.

If a man, warmly clad and booted and slickered, be standing on the stern deck, putting out the mile-long strip of nets when one of these unexpected waves rises up under the boat—he goes overboard. And if he becomes entangled in the weighted nets and the boat goes chugging ahead, he is drowned.

Sometimes it is possible to reverse the boat's engines, back up and pull in the net until the man overboard is drawn alongside, and at last, into the boat. But the nets slip out swiftly, and it takes quick action on the part of the man at the engine. It requires, too, that the man, as he goes overboard, wrap the reënforced upper edge of the net he is handling around his wrists—if he has time to think of it in the emergency. Clinging to the net may save his life, or if not, make it possible to recover his body, thus simplifying the matter of insurance and the settling of his estate. And these fishermen think first of their families, even in the face of death.

All these things seemed to have an almost morbid interest for John. And Elise, out of her deep love for him, knew that there must be a reason for it, even if he were unwilling to admit it. His eyes narrowed as he talked about the first trip of the season. There would still be floating ice on the lake. A man overboard would be helpless in that icy water.

ON the bright May morning when Elise Lawton saw her father alive for the last time, she stood on the dock with the other village women, watching the little fleet of boats put out.

Each woman concentrated on her own man's boat, and Elise watched with a lover's eyes the graceful movements of her father's new helper and the slow, methodical preparations of Pete Ort with a wonder that her dad put up with his clumsiness.

She was glad there were three in the sturdy little boat. It was a long trip to North Island, and three pairs of hands made quicker work of planting the nets that were stowed away in boxes piled high behind the engine. She had always had an unconfessed dread of the lake at night, and something of John's unspoken nervousness communicated itself to her.

"Good luck, father!" she cried, running to kiss him good-by. That set her apart from the villagers, for the fishermen's women were superstitious about farewells. She ran alongside the boat as it slid down the narrow walled-in river. Denning caught her hand as she ran, and carried it to his lips, so that she had to keep on running almost to the end of the dock. That caused a murmur among the women, and they turned and left her standing there alone—waving, adoring.

Oh, there had been something in John's eyes! Some unspoken return of her adoration! There had been! She hugged that thought all day long.

It was long after dark before she saw the fish boat again. It was the only one overdue, and Elise was waiting anxiously on the dock for the first faint *chug-chug* of the engine that could be heard almost an hour before the boat reached shore. When finally it limped in, the blue-eyed stranger was lying in a grotesque sprawl on the little rear deck. Her father was under a tarpaulin on the floor!

And a nerve-shattered Pete Ort was fighting the reluctant engine with hands that shook.

Elise hadn't kept her vigil alone. When a fish boat is overdue, the men of the village wait. Not that there is much chance of their finding a lost or disabled boat on the vast bosom of the lake, but because the waiting is easier there.

Kind hands lifted Albert Lawton to the boardwalk that fronted the fish houses. Pitying heads were shaken.

"Can't do nothing fer him, Elise," Pete said between chattering teeth to the girl who bent over her father. "We tried. But you can fer—him," with a jerk of his head toward John. "He's broke his leg. He went overboard after your father—an' I—an' the boat—hit 'im."

"How long—" Elise began, but she couldn't finish the question.

John understood, and even in his pain he tried to comfort her.

"About three o'clock, Elise. We got a lot of water out of him, but we couldn't make him breathe. The nets got fouled in the propeller and Pete couldn't get her reversed. We pulled the net in by hand and I went overboard—but we didn't get to him soon

enough," he managed before he fainted.

Seventeen miles in a slow fish boat, in water-soaked clothes and the air bitingly sharp! With a broken leg. No wonder he fainted. The wonder was that he had managed to hold out until they reached shore.

"It war one of them sudden waves," Pete explained sullenly. "It busted the propeller blade, too. The net, I mean—"

None of the pioneer women about her could have met the heart-breaking situation more bravely, more selflessly, than did this city girl. She turned to the injured man when she saw for herself that nothing could be done for her father.

"Get the doctor," she commanded, but some one had already gone. "Carry them—to the—house," she went on.

OUT of her numbed thinking came one sure, swift bit of intuition. Pete, at the engine, was responsible for her father's death, but he would never confess that his stupefied failure to function properly in the emergency had cost a life. Nor that he had deliberately run John down to eliminate the only witness to the tragedy and remove the only obstacle in the way of his matrimonial intentions. John was too new on the lakes to realize either of these things.

It might have been pure accident, but Elise didn't think so. Her father's going overboard was the sheerest accident. Men usually knelt on the rear deck, putting the nets overboard, and if the lake were smooth, got to their feet occasionally to rest their cramped muscles. It was always during these periods when a man was standing that the accident occurred. One of those sudden waves, failure to handle the engine properly—the slowness of the rescue was inexcusable on Pete's part. John must have gone overboard when he saw that Pete was not coping with the situation. And then Pete had tried to kill him!

Except for one wild breakdown the day of the funeral, Elise hid her grief sternly. There was no time yet for grief. John was delirious and had to be watched every minute to keep him from twisting the broken leg in its harness. When the pneumonia was at its worst, the girl was kept so busy that she hadn't a moment to grieve. It was only when he was out of danger, when only the slow knitting of the bones of his leg kept him helpless in his bed, that she had time to realize what had happened to her.

That realization was further postponed by the things her patient had cried out in his delirium. Care for the living must always come first.

"Black water! She's conked— This hellish fog—and eight passengers—hold the fool, somebody! We've got a chance. Don't let him go overboard! He's crazy! Oh— No slow drowning for him. He'll hit the bottom of the sea from this height! And I never lost a passenger. Down to the bottom of the sea! But there is blue water—Michigan water—peaceful blue water—like Elise's eyes—bring him back to you—no water shall hurt you. Bringing him to you!"

On and on until Elise could bear no more. Until she covered his mouth with her hand and told him there was no more water. He was far away from water. And then he would cling to her hand, and relax again into sleep—only to burst forth again. Over and over.

And when there was no delirium, he asked her one day if he had talked

during his horrible nightmares. He asked her so suddenly, so sharply, that she had no time to frame a denial. She could only drop her eyelids to cover her telltale eyes.

"What did I tell you, Elise?" he asked gently, reaching for her hands. "Did I tell you that I loved you? Did I?"

She nodded, lifting his hand to her cheek, so that the burning flush of happy confusion conveyed itself to the man by two senses simultaneously.

"Lovely, lovely Elise," he sighed softly. "Who wouldn't love you? Sweet and gentle and lovely. Well, it may be natural for men to fall in love with their nurses, beautiful, but I loved you long before that. And I didn't intend to tell you."

"Why not?" she asked softly, slipping to her knees beside the bed. "I love you, too. I loved you even two years ago, back home—"

"You mustn't!" he commanded sharply, snatching his hand away.

ELISE sank back on her heels, wondering if this were a return of the delirium.

"If you feel anything but pity for me, kill it! Kill it instantly! I'm only half a man. Half of me died of fear—and I can't bring it to life. Listen, Elise! I probably raved about it, so you know already. I had eight passengers coming from Cuba to Florida. And I crashed! On the water. At night. I lost a passenger — a frenzied idiot who dived overboard! I had rockets. We were picked up. No one was hurt but me. And the crash wasn't my fault. The motor fell plumb out of the plane. We weren't rescued until the plane had sunk and they were all standing on the wings. I was injured when I fell on the stick as we struck the water—"

"Hush! Hush! It doesn't matter."

"It does matter!" he cried wildly. "I can't fly. I've lost my nerve. Motors and water! Twin horrors—"

"But you aren't afraid of water, dear. You went into that icy lake after my father—"

"And reached him too late! Maybe if I hadn't been afraid, I'd have been in time—have brought him back to you."

"No man can live long in that icy water," the girl consoled him. "It wasn't your fault. It was Pete's. I *know!*"

The man's eyes were desperate, wanting to believe, afraid to believe.

"Pete wanted to marry me," Elise went on, flushing shamefacedly at the admission. "He tried to run you down in the water—partly so no one would be left to tell of his clumsiness in failing to get to father. And partly to get rid of you. And you brought dad back in spite of that!"

"It's no use, Elise," he said wearily. "I hate myself. I thought if I conquered my fear of this beautiful blue water, it would help. I could dare to love you. But I don't! Only a flight over water at night—with a safe landing—will make me whole again. The doctors wanted to be kind. They called it nerve shock—something like shell shock—"

"I love you," Elise interrupted softly.

John groaned. "Then you love half a man, my darling. Even Pete is a better man than I am!"

"Pete is a beast!" said Elise intensely. "I'd rather have half of you than a million like Pete."

"What's left of me will always love you. But we won't talk about it until —until I make a perfect landing after a—night flight—over black water."

The words came from between clenched teeth.

AND so the situation stood one morning near the end of July, when Elise Lawton flung open the door to face a day so sparkling clean and clear that it made her gasp with delight. July days in northern Michigan are like that. And this July day, greeted from the prow-like porch of the Lawton home, was breath-taking.

There was no foreign sound, only the twittering of birds, the whispering of pines, the gentle lapping of little waves on the shore below. As she stood there, thrilling to the glory of the day for the first time since her father's death, Elise heard the proud clump of cane and crutch that marked her patient's slow progress from the downstairs bedroom, across the living room. This was the third day he had been allowed to walk. Dear John!

If only her father were there, noisily building the kitchen fire for her, she would have been unbearably happy. As it was, her happiness was coming out from beneath the cloud of her loss. July mornings do that to you, especially when beneath your casual daily companionship with the one man in the world a great pulsing love is tugging at restraining bonds.

"Take John away with you to-day! You must!"

She made her way slowly to the steps that led down to the road. Her day's supply of milk and cream was her objective. It would be in a wooden box at the foot of the long flight of steps.

Down the steps she went—but the box was empty.

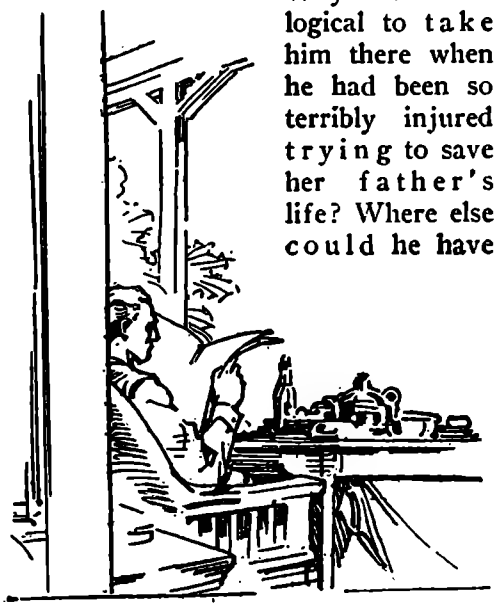
Her first thought as she stood looking up the road was one of annoyance. Breakfast without cream isn't a pleasant prospect for a conscientious hostess. Well, maybe the farmer was delayed, she thought, as she turned to mount the steps.

And then her heart stood still!

Red paint!

The risers of the steps were covered with red paint! Red paint, carelessly splashed on! The village brand of shame! Oh, what was there to cry shame about? Because she had been alone in the house with a desperately ill and injured man for two months?

John Denning had been a member of their household before the accident. Why wasn't it logical to take him there when he had been so terribly injured trying to save her father's life? Where else could he have



been taken? The hospital was seventy miles away, and the roads the first of May were a morass of mud. The fifty village houses were overrun with children.

There had been no nurses available, even if there had been money to pay them. Oh, didn't the villagers realize that there had been nothing to do but take care of John herself? Even if she hadn't loved him, she owed him every care for his attempt to save her father. Surely even the dumb villagers could see that!

At first the village women had dropped in every day, with delicacies for the sick man and consolation for the girl. She realized with a feeling of surprise that not a soul had called upon her for a week—and she had been so absorbed in John that she hadn't even missed them.

It wasn't like the fishermen and their wives to be so unsympathetic toward one so recently bereaved by the treacherous lake. Was Pete Ort behind it? Of course! He had tried to kill John. Was Pete taking this method of driving John away? Did Pete think, she wondered with icy contempt, that she would ever, under any circumstances, marry a lout like him? Even if John did go away?

What should she do? That red paint was the first warning, she knew. If John spent another night under her roof, it would be made hideous by noises. Cow bells, tin pans and sticks, fish horns, automobile horns and jeering yells would begin at sundown and make sleep impossible. And the racket would be kept up until John left her house—or called in the minister to marry them.

What *could* she do? She couldn't ask the sick man to leave her home in his present weakened condition. He was only able to totter a few steps at a time with the aid of cane and crutch. How could she bear to tell him that their perfectly innocent relationship had been so unjustly maligned? How could she bear to stay on in the community that had so misjudged her, even if John did go away?

But where could they go?

There was one alternative. She could marry him, if he could be persuaded. The villagers would then turn their grim persecution into a joyous celebration—they were as primitive as that in their intense reactions. They

would forget their unjust suspicions, whether she could or not. They would hoot Pete out of the village, if Pete were responsible for that red paint, as part of the wedding celebration. But as long as they lived, the villagers would laugh about that red paint marriage.

SHE was still staring desperately at the wet paint when John clumped out onto the porch. She flew to him.

"Listen!" he commanded, with a far-away look in his eyes.

Elise listened. A faint, far-away sound. An airplane! John's rapt expression told the girl how homesick he was for the old life.

"He's going to land! Oh, Elise, run down to the beach and find out who the pilot is! Tell him I'm here and ask him to come up, will you?"

Elise ran into the house to get a sweater for John first.

"Don't you try to get off the porch, will you?" she begged.

"No! No!" he promised almost impatiently.

A seaplane! It glided down to the water, slowed, and taxied to the smooth sand beach. A man as slender as John Denning got out, pushing his goggles wearily up onto his forehead. Half the village was there to greet the strange bird man.

"How far to Northport?" asked the pilot.

"Twelve miles."

"Can I get gas here? And something to eat?"

"If you please," said Elise, breaking through the ring of people, "I'd be glad to give you breakfast. John Denning is at my house."

"John Denning!" cried the man in delighted amazement. "Where?"

Elise pointed to John waving frantically from the porch, and the flyer didn't wait to escort the girl home. He tore up the steps, and was still pumping both John's hands up and down in his delight when Elise got there.

"Elise," beamed John, "this high flying insect is Bill Stern, mostly known as Stern Bill because he isn't. And Bill, Elise is from Dayton—one of those 4-0 girls. My hostess, nurse, and guardian angel."

"4-0, Miss Lawton, in case this idiot's gibbering is incomprehensible, is navy language, meaning absolutely perfect," said Bill so solemnly that Elise didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Congratulations in order, old man?"

"Yes," said Elise.

"No," said John.

"One of you is a liar—but I think I'll tender my congratulations anyway. John's a good egg, when you get used to him, Miss Lawton," teased Bill.

And then Elise slipped away to prepare breakfast. "I'll have tea instead of coffee," she planned. "Maybe they won't miss the cream. And I'll have bacon and eggs and toast and jam and no cereal."

For she knew very well now why there had been no milk and cream. If she went to the village store, they would be "just fresh out" of everything she asked for, even if it was right before her eyes. She would have to drive seventeen miles to the next village to buy supplies, and she would have to buy a big supply before word reached that store, if she should try to defy the village edict.

But did she dare defy it? John needed twelve hours of sleep a night to rebuild his lost strength. Dared she submit him to the nightmare of noise that would never stop until the villagers im-

posed their will? Would John not have to capitulate in the end?

But wasn't he the sort of person who would refuse to be coerced?

Oh, maybe she could get Bill Stern to take him away! Maybe there would be a way out! John loved her. He had told her so. He would come back, when he was well, when he had proved himself to himself.

And then another thought struck the girl. If Pete Ort was behind the village campaign to force her to marry, maybe he would try to take advantage of her helplessness to make her marry him after John left! Maybe he would incite the villagers to keep up the noise until in frantic exhaustion she married him. She had heard of that happening before in the north country.

SHE laid the breakfast table with shaking hands, then called Bill Stern to help carry the table to the porch, for the day was too lovely to waste a moment indoors. Anyway, John couldn't take his eyes from Bill's plane. When they two were alone in the kitchen, she whispered hurriedly:

"Take John away with you to-day! You must! The villagers misunderstand our being alone here. They think we ought to be married, and John won't marry me until he has made a night flight over water—with a safe landing. Oh, take him away to-day, Stern Bill!"

"But why the rush?" asked the surprised pilot.

"They are going to 'bell' the house to-night! You know—noise. And it won't stop until John goes away or marries me. He doesn't know it. Oh, take him away, Bill! Save him from that humiliation."

"How about you—here alone?" asked Bill.

"They won't bother me after John goes," the girl lied desperately.

"When do we eat?" came John's voice from the porch. Dear John! Too excited to let Bill out of his sight for a moment.

"Coming!" called the two conspirators from the kitchen.

John sat facing the lake, hardly taking his eyes off the silver plane that rested half on the water, half on the sand. Bill, who could understand even better than Elise John's state of mind, asked casually:

"Like a flight to-day, John?"

And if he waited breathlessly for an answer, he didn't show it. John turned a little whiter under his disappearing tan, gulped once and said:

"As passenger, yes. Only got one foot to kick the rudder bar."

And Bill choked conveniently over a mouthful of hot tea.

Painfully, clumsily, John negotiated the long flight of steps.

"I'll probably have to be carried back up," he grumbled. "Never can make it alone—"

With Bill boosting, and Elise standing yearningly by, John got into the plane. Single-handed, Bill pushed until the pontoons floated free, climbed aboard, then the motor roared, and they were off and away.

Elise sighed with relief and regret as she climbed back up the paint-splashed steps. How would Bill manage to keep John away? But she could safely leave that to Bill. He could meet and cope with emergencies.

HOURS passed. The quiet was ominous with warning. Elise wondered, as she busied herself with household tasks, where Bill had taken John, how he had managed to persuade him to stay away.

And then, about six o'clock, she had a visitor. Pete. He walked into the kitchen and grinned. That evil, yellow-fanged grin.

"So he skun out on you! I was aimin' to make him do that. When they bell the house to-night, I'm the man that 'll be alone here with yer. I'm the one that 'll go out onto the porch and call the preacher. And you better be a damn' good wife to me for marryin' yer after all this—"

"They could bell the house forever, and I'd never marry you, Pete Ort," said the girl contemptuously, turning to leave the room.

And then Pete had her in his arms.

"You stuck-up hussy!" he ground out between his teeth. "I'll learn you! You'll marry me and be damn' glad to do it when I get through with you. Nobody else 'd have you!"

And then he was trying to reach her lips. Elise screamed in terror and loathing—and Pete laughed.

And the teakettle went right on singing cheerfully! Its song seemed to be trying to tell her something—

Almost she let him kiss her. Slowly she led him across the kitchen. Finally—oh, so slowly—she managed to back him up to the stove. One desperate lunge, and the steam from the singing kettle poured itself against his thinly clad back.

Then it was Pete who screamed.

Elise fled. To the stairs, locking the door behind her. To her room, locking that door. Then furniture against it. From there she could drop to the kitchen roof and then to the ground. If she could only keep Pete from breaking down all those doors until dark, maybe she could slip away in the darkness and escape.

She made up a little bundle of clothes and money. Minutes passed—minutes that eventually became hours. Where was Pete? Was he burned badly enough to send him to the doctor? Oh, where was John? Safe?

Voices. The villagers were gathering. She heard heavy boots come up the long flight of wooden steps. Then footsteps inside.

"Elise!" And then again. "Elise! You better come out. We got the preacher. We'll start bellin' if you don't."

Then a derisive automobile horn. And another. The noise gathered in volume as darkness fell. Now, while they were expending their first burst of energy on the noise!

Out onto the kitchen roof she went. She peered over the edge. Suppose there was some one guarding the back of the house? There would be, of course, unless Pete had thought to lock the back door from the outside.

AND then—oh, could it be? Through the intermittent bursts of noise she heard a steady humming. Had Bill come back for her? She slung the carefully prepared loop of her bundle over her arm. She dropped flat onto the roof and wriggled, feet first, over the edge, trying desperately to keep a finger hold on the edge of the shingles. But the shingles broke, and she dropped to the ground before she expected to. Struck the ground and rolled, unhurt, to the edge of the hill—and then deliberately kept on rolling! To the foot of the hill—almost onto the beach—and out of sight!

She was free! Now what?

The humming of the plane was coming closer. Closer. She waited until it struck the water, and then she ran for the place where it would come up onto the beach.

"Bill!" she screamed. "Don't land! I'll wade out! You must take me away!"

Into the water she went, running, until it reached her knees. Willing hands reached for her, and she was aboard with two goggled men!

She snuggled down in the rear cockpit against the man there, flinging her arms about his neck. Safe! The man slid an arm about her and patted her gently, comfortingly. But there was no ardor in his embrace. Just gentle comfort. Oh, had she been wrong? Didn't John love her after all? She drew proudly away, and then sat huddled, miserable, alone. The man's hand sought hers, gripped it, shook it, pounded her knee with their two clasped hands. How queer!

And then they glided down beside a long, lighted dock. Why, it must be Northport! Had they come twelve miles in that little time? They slid gently to rest beside another plane, and she was lifted out and carried to shore. But John couldn't have carried her! Oh, it must have been Bill there with her in the rear cockpit! And that explained everything.

John had been piloting the plane!

And now they were lifting him gently from the plane. They carried him to shore and placed him gently on the stone bench beside her. He pulled off his goggles with a sigh of satisfaction, and grinned.

"I did it!" he crowed, his eyes dancing with delight. "Two flights! Two landings! Over black water! Oh, Elise, I'm a man again!"

"You've been a man all the time," she said softly. "The man I love."

"4-0," Bill said in a strangled voice.

And presently, when their willing assistants had withdrawn, John began to laugh.

When Elise and Bill questioned him he chortled:

"Oh, Bill! You'll never know how funny you were! Telling me that wild yarn about rescuing Elise!"

Elise's startled eyes sought Bill's. He gestured for silence and commented merely, "Yeah?"

"Elise, darling!" John went on, still chortling with amusement. "You're an actress, not a nurse. Running out into the water that way, and screaming to Bill to take you away. Why, Elise, he's even got us a marriage license, and he's got a minister waiting up there. And the funny part is that your cute little game wasn't necessary at all. I got my nerve back the minute we took to the air to-day. And Elise and I could have been married back home among our own people—"

"And cheat the squadron out of this romantic marriage?" interrupted Bill with mock severity. "Not if I can help it. Let's go!"

"Go along, Bill," laughed John. "Tell 'em we're coming."

And taking the girl gently into his arms, he said, "I hope you don't mind being married this way, honey. Bill thinks it's for the good of my soul. He doesn't realize that you've cured my soul-sickness already."

"But do you mind being married this way?" questioned Elise.

"Mind! Bless your sweet heart! I couldn't wait another minute for you! Now—kiss me. Do you realize that you've never kissed me, Elise? We've got a lot of lost time to make up for."

They were still making up that lost time when Bill rejoined them.

"Snap out of it, you two," he ordered with mock gruffness. "Let's get those kisses legalized."

And they did.

Something to Live For

"I'm tired of everything," stormed Marcita. "I want to go away and never come back!" But Fate listened with a sly smile

By Daisy Dean

MARCITA looked around the room with guilty criticism in her large gray eyes. She didn't always feel like this, but the crowd disgusted her to-night.

Yet she reflected that she belonged to the crowd and their sins were only the sins of youth. Jazz and general hilarity. She hadn't always been so soberly aloof and critical. Was she getting beyond the youthful horizon, feeling high and mighty like this?

She turned her head to regard Reggie. As usual he was by her side lolling (he never sat) in a chair. He wore his blank expression and toyed with a cigarette. He seldom smoked, but then he seldom did anything. Except hang around. Seldom drank. Seldom talked. Never made love to her as other men had done or tried to do.

His "it" consisted of a great deal of length, blue eyes which would have been nice if he hadn't squinted them all the time, and nondescript blond hair. A good clothes model to tote around, but nothing to get hot and bothered about.

The room began to stifle her. She pushed back her auburn hair and squirmed in the chair.

"Dance, Cita?" Reggie had noticed her discomfiture.

"No," she said, too abruptly.

"Something wrong?"

"I—I have a headache." How original she was getting!

"Dickens of a place for a headache." His remarks were always drawled and unconcerned.

"Perhaps we'd better go, Reggie. Before I wet-blanket the party."

"Kayoh," he agreed, rising lazily on long slim legs.

They made their farewells to the tune of a few half-hearted protests.

SEATED beside Reggie in the roadster, the spring wind blowing her hair awry, Marcita felt more like breathing.

Reggie scarcely spoke while driving. Slumped over the wheel, cigarette thrust between long fingers, he whistled or hummed as adroitly he managed the car. He wasn't a young girl's dream of love, she thought, but he could drive. Even indifferent, he controlled a car with beautiful lazy precision.

"Feel better?" He didn't turn at the question.

"Yes. The air. I needed it. Drive for a while?"

"Sure."

"I'm all out of tune to-night. I don't know what's the matter with me. I wish I could go away somewhere and never come back. I'm sick of every one and everything."

If her outburst registered in his mind he showed no signs of it.

Some time later he increased the speed of the engine and with his foot on the accelerator inquired, "You meant what you said, didn't you?"

That made her impatient. "Of course I meant. What do you suppose I said it for?"

"Wanted to be sure, that's all."

He continued his silent speedy driving.

Reggie seemed all wrong, too. What was the matter with him? With her? She had everything that money could buy and wanted love. Searched for it as some people hunt out antiques. But she had never met a man worth loving in all her twenty-one years. She had encountered a good many poor substitutes for love. That was all. Now she was tired of the pleasures of her gang. Of life itself.

As Harold Vandoon's cousin, Reggie had drifted into the crowd in his aimless unconcerned manner. He had paid brief court to some of the other girls before permanently attaching himself to Marcita. He then seemed content to go where, when and why she willed. An ideal escort. She took his devotion for granted as certain and dumb. Certain because he was always at her beck and call. Dumb because he didn't even try to make love to her.

They all came to regard Reggie as a queer variety of sap. A hanger-on in the crowd, but strangely not of them.

Marcita's thoughts scurried along as the roadster devoured the white ribbon of road. She felt abused and sorry for herself. Ideals all gone. Barren world. Futile love ambitions. Life was perverse. What would she do with the balance of hers? Just live on and on.

Like gloomy waters her thoughts encompassed her to the song of passing crickets and the scent of sweet green growing things.

She came to herself abruptly as the roadster stopped.

Reggie alighted deftly and stood in readiness to assist Marcita.

"Something wrong with the car?" The inquiry was doubtful.

"Not a thing."

At his reply she grew suddenly startled, almost afraid. The stars, a moon, blackness of trees, were all she could see and he didn't look the same. He was standing upright, for one thing, and his eyes weren't squinted.

"I don't understand." But something about him caused her to step obediently out of the car.

"I'm sure of that. You don't even understand yourself. I've known that since I've associated with you and that merry mad gang."

WAS that Reggie speaking? Was she mad? She became panicky with a vague fear. Her voice stuck somewhere in the region of her knees.

Ignoring her, he was going up a path bordered with scented shrubbery. Blindly she followed, not knowing why except that she was at heart a coward and far less afraid of Reggie and his new prowess than of the darkness behind her.

A lodge flanked with wide verandas on all sides was their evident destination. It seemed to arise from out the trees to meet them.

He mounted the steps, inserted a key in the lock, snapped a switch, and when the lodge was illuminated in light hospitably invited her to enter.

"Will you please explain this outrage?"

That was her own voice speaking, wasn't it? She must have coined that phrase from a book because she didn't feel outraged at all. It was funny.

Reggie was noncommittal. "Nothing outrageous has happened—yet."

Yet? The "yet" sounded ominous. Maybe he was a bandit or a crook. It began to look not so funny. She stumbled into a deep chair, even forgetting to note what period or design it was—unusual for Marcita.

"Are you going to rob me? Is that what you intend?"

Reggie was laughing. It was odd to note that he could laugh. She had never heard him laugh before. Besides he had remarkable teeth and his laugh boomed out like a villain's in a melodrama. Melodrama. The word clung to her mind.

He was answering her question now.

"What have you that is worth plundering, Marcita? Except dollars. I flatter myself that my bank account matches yours. As to things of greater value—it is doubtful if you or your kind have any to rob."

"Me and my kind? How dare you be so insulting and to whom do you refer?"

"Beautiful and dumb it is. By 'you' I mean Miss Marcita Kingston, rich, dissatisfied, selfish and pleasure-loving. 'Your kind' means the rest of the gang. One is judged by the company they keep, so your ridiculous crowd is *you*, isn't it? What could I possibly rob any of you of, except the few basic principles I have plundered to use in my new novel?"

"Novel? What do you mean — novel?"

"Just what I say. I write. Here. Often I remain here for days, weeks, months. This is one of the times. I intended to drive you home first, but you said you wanted to get away, too. Always willing to oblige, I brought you along."

"And you expect I am going to remain here alone with you?"

"You can hotfoot it back to town if you wish. The sixty miles might put you back in tune."

"Wha—what do you write about?"

"Recently about you and the crowd. My reasons for hanging around."

"Then your drawling nonchalance has been just a pose? All the while you have been dissecting us as a scientist does a pack of bugs? And I suppose I have been the main study!"

"Why not, Marcita? You do represent youth. If you stay with me the two weeks I am going to remain here I could study you to better advantage. You in turn, might find a cure for your *ennui*. I can assure you of perfect safety. I won't bother you."

MARCITA stood in the center of the room utterly dazed. It didn't seem real. It must be a dream. She was too surprised to cry and too outraged to laugh. Yet she had no desire to go back to town at this hour of night. He had no intention of taking her and she was afraid of the dark. Besides, she didn't know where she was and wouldn't ask.

"Take your time thinking it over." He was being deliberate and patient.

Darn him!

Her thoughts darted around crazily. The crowd would roll over and expire. He had a Louis XV period grand. Wrote novels. A copy of Rembrandt's "A Young Man" hung over the Chippendale desk. Early American barrel chairs. Didn't like them. Nice and comfortable for a man. Reggie — a writer. Good accessories around the fireplace. Nice to sit there and watch him write. Logs burning. She had no one to be accountable to. Her aunt was in Europe. The davenport before the fireplace was like Reggie's hair. Blond and nondescript.

"When you have stamped your approval or otherwise on the furnishings let me have your decision. I could make you a cup of coffee and show you to your room."

Making fun of her, was he? Well, she would show him two could play at the same game. If he wanted a specimen around for two weeks to study, she'd stay and make life miserable for him. Just how, she could decide later.

"I am too good a scout to walk off on your little melodrama." (There, she had found a place for that word.) "I don't want the coffee. Show me to my room, please."

He led her to a large airy bedroom. The furnishings, the vanity, the bed and windows were all chintz trimmed. Pink chintz with green flowers. A masculine conception of a feminine boudoir, she decided.

He handed her the key wordlessly. She flushed.

"That is not at all necessary. I am not afraid of you."

"Very charming, whether compliment or sarcasm."

"It doesn't take the trouble to be either. Good night."

He was at the door when another thought assailed her. She called out.

He turned back. "Yes?"

"I shall certainly be a bedraggled specimen after two weeks of sleeping, eating, romping and so forth in the same evening gown."

He laughed again. Why did he laugh like that? It made him fascinating.

"I am equal to any emergency. Look ye in the drawers and clothes closets, make yourself at home and use whatsoever you see fit. Good night."

She locked the door in sudden resentment. With the key he had laid on the vanity, despite her protests. He must be insane. Did he keep women's clothes around for his—his—lady friends? The thought angered her,

but she looked in the designated places. She found to her surprise everything any woman could desire. Silken pyjamas, underthings, hosiery, gowns of every description, shoes and hats.

She spent an hour in feminine revelry trying on this and that. She could hardly restrain a thrill when she found that everything fitted her as perfectly as her own wardrobe at home.

At length, selecting the prettiest pair of pyjamas, she fell asleep wondering whom they belonged to. And she found it a rather disagreeable thought.

WHEN she awoke in the morning she jumped out of bed startled. This was not her own familiar room. Where was she?

Then she remembered. Alone in some woods or other, in a lodge with Reggie. Hopelessly compromised if any one knew. But no one would know. She hugged this thought to her heart with a girlish giggle.

The smell of fresh coffee drifted in. She took a hurried shower in the adjoining bathroom; then selected her wearing apparel. The finale of this was an Alice blue gingham dress. Ruffled, tucked, beribboned and lacy. It made her look like sweet sixteen wanting to be kissed.

She felt that way, too. Had dreamed of an adventure like this. Only Reggie had not figured in the dream. Rather some unknown. Funny that it should be he who had made the adventure come true! But she wouldn't let him know she was pleased. Her intentions were to annoy him. Today she would be silent, aloof and sarcastic.

She joined him at breakfast poorly portraying all three of these things.

Clad in loose corduroy trousers and blue sport shirt, he was doing the cooking, also the serving. He smiled at her and said good morning. Just as if they were the best of friends. His eyes lacked all trace of the squint. They regarded her intently, blue and amused. But he still did things with an easy panther grace. Lazily.

"Sleep well?"

"Fair, thank you."

The pug (it *was* pug) nose went up, causing the auburn curls to flop out and then back into place disarmingly.

"Every guest who sleeps there comments on the sweet country odor and southerly breeze in that room."

Guests. Ah! Oh! Perhaps the guest who owned the clothes had commented too. Angry curiosity assailed her.

"The one for whom you bought these clothes? Whose are they?"

She realized her impertinence in asking. He did too. He gave her a penetrating look.

"Sit down, Cita. Everything is ready. As to that other matter, I don't like to remind you that it is my own personal affair, but I am forced to."

She felt thoroughly insulted as she ate breakfast. Best breakfast she had tasted in a long time. But she remained morose and silent. Reggie talked on about this, that and the other thing, unmindful of her pique.

He cleared the table. Washed and wiped the dishes. She would have liked helping. Never having done any housework, the novelty appealed to her. But she was stubborn and offended, so she stood by the window regarding the landscape.

It was lovely. Directly behind the lodge was a thick wood. A little beyond that she could hear the murmur of a stream.

A white angora kitten lazily made its way across the veranda steps. Marcita had a weakness for kittens. Forgetting her peeve, she ran out and

caught it in her arms. It seemed quite a pet and wanted to play.

SHE was so busy playing with the kitten that she didn't know Reggie was standing behind her until he spoke.

"Glad you and Zinzabald have made friends."

Not so easy to be dignified and aloof when doing such a childish thing as playing with a kitten named Zinzabald. Marcita had to smile in spite of herself.

"What a ridiculous name for such an adorable little fluff!"

"If you can think of a more appropriate one the privilege is yours."

He sat down beside her on the steps.

"We are going to be friends while you are here, aren't we, Cita?"

So. He took it for granted that she would stay here. Somehow she could not meet his eyes. "I presume you can study me better if we were friends."

"That is very unkind of you, isn't it?"

"You don't deny that those have been and are your intentions, do you?"

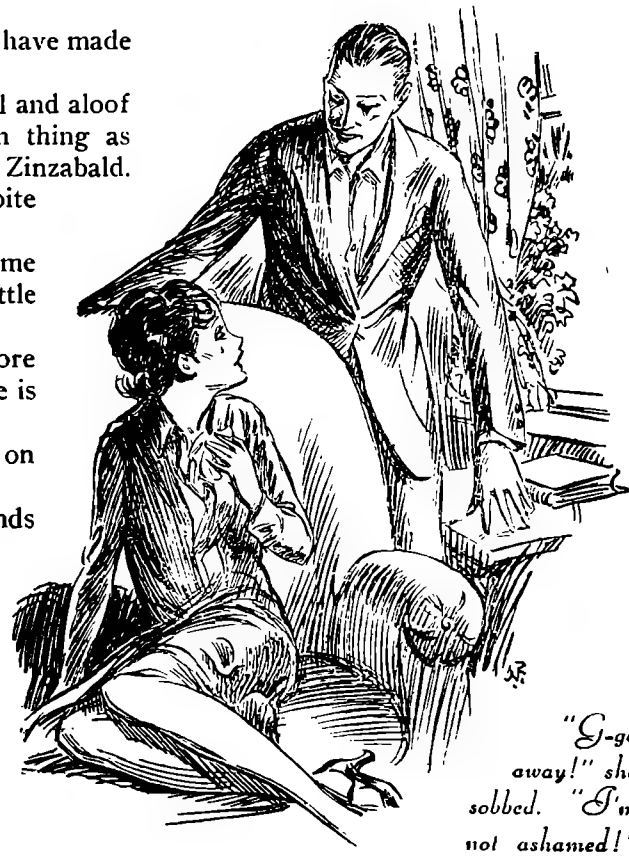
"No. But you put it as if it were an insult."

"You can hardly expect me to be flattered about it."

"Don't you like anything unless it flatters you? You are so vain that you can't give something of yourself to posterity?"

She flushed. "Vain?" she inquired rather stupidly.

"Yes. Vain. You thought I was in love with you. To find that I am merely studying you as a specimen of modern youth has wounded your vanity and pride. Yet being in love with you meant nothing to you before. I was a sap in your estimation then. Now that I am no longer a sap you are offended. You have been too much flattered all your life, Marcita."



"G-go away!" she sobbed. "I'm not ashamed!"

That was true, but it wasn't nice.

"Plenty of men have been in love with me. Why should I get all hot and bothered because you aren't? I certainly don't need or want your flattery."

She turned back to the lodge, but suddenly he grasped her wrists.

"You self-centered, spoiled little

creature," he said and unexpectedly pressed angry lips against hers.

She held the back of her hand against her lips and looked at him bewildered. No man had ever dared to kiss her like that before.

He laughed, perfectly self-possessed.

"I didn't do that because I am in love with you, either. Because I could hardly control the desire to spank you I kissed you instead."

Such an unusual manner of being kissed. By Reggie. Who she had always supposed would kiss her smearingly and with soppy thanks that she permitted him to kiss her at all. But he had kissed her as one would a bad child who ought to be spanked. In anger.

He wasn't in love with her. This was a shock. Reggie, who she had thought was dotty about her, didn't care at all. Was merely studying her. Making fun of her crowd. Yet if she came angry and left now he could say she ran true to form.

For some perverse reason she wanted him to think differently of her. Find he had been in error. So, almost surprising herself, she held out her hand.

"I—I'm sorry. I'm not the worthless specimen you suppose. I can be a regular fellow. I will be while I am here. I can type, too. Perhaps I could help you with your novel—and—and giving myself to posterity."

For a moment gray eyes looked into intent blue ones. Then something in his gaze made her falter and lower her lashes.

But he took the proffered hand and said, "Kayoh."

AFTER that first day Marcita dropped all play-acting and sophistication. She reverted to the child she really was under her social veneer. She ran through the woods, waded in the stream, played hide and seek with the kitten around the lodge. In a word, romped like an adorable lovely little girl.

She helped Reggie with his novel in the afternoons. Typed. Read his notes. Gave him a few pointers he had overlooked. Withheld the flame of her anger at some of his comments about her crowd. She had divorced them herself in a way. Criticized them that last Sunday evening. Still, because she had known them since childhood and knew they weren't as bad as he was painting them, she had to control her desire to be angry.

She never thought to ask herself why she did this. She was enjoying herself, and daytime hours were too lovely to allow her to think.

But at night, lying awake in the chintz covered bed, she promised herself all manner of revenge on Reggie when the two weeks were up!

She would say something which would let him know she had been a good fellow, but hadn't really liked it. She would put on her best duchess manner. Say with her nose in the air: "Well, now that your little melodrama is over and I have served my posterity purposes will you kindly take me back where I belong? Further, I do not care ever to see you again."

Something like that. Fun to think up different ways of hurting him. She had an unreasonable childish desire to hurt him because he had managed to make her docile.

She tried unsuccessfully to turn domestic. Tried to get the breakfast one morning. She burned one of her lovely fingers, spilled coffee all over a pink gingham creation and boiled the eggs until the white oozed out. The toast was scorched to a midnight black.

Reggie laughed and suggested that

he continue assuming the culinary duties. She angered under the thought that she seemed useless. The next morning she conceived the idea of scrubbing the verandas. Ridiculous. Even a seasoned housekeeper wouldn't have tried it. She was a comical sight when she spilled water over another adorable dress, over the inquisitive Zinzabald and the porch.

Reggie greeted this with hoots of villainous laughter. Marcita withheld her tears, but after that she kept diligently to making her own bed and washing up the breakfast and luncheon dishes.

"I DON'T seem to be cut out for anything," she protested to Reggie one evening. "You can write. Others can draw, or sing, or act. I can't even be housewifely."

Reggie replied that she could type nicely. Oh, type? What was there of originality in that. Almost anyone could type.

She went over to the Louis XV grand piano and began to play. She wasn't much of a pianist but she made a lovely picture with the firelight reflected on her flaming hair. She thought he was busy writing and not noticing her. She tried to play softly.

Suddenly he was behind her. "Yes, you have a special talent, Cita. You were made and molded for love."

She stopped playing. Love? Hadn't she always searched for love? Yet she had never in her twenty-one years met a man—

The thought stopped in mid-air. What was the matter with her? Why was she trembling? Why did she feel like running to the bedroom? Flinging herself on the bed to cry? Reggie. No. No. Ridiculous. She couldn't be in love with Reggie. In the first place, he didn't love her. Never had. She was just an insect he was dissecting to put in his old novel. But she was trembling. Couldn't look at him.

Darn it!

She could feel the blue eyes on her. He knew. Had wanted to make her care on purpose. So he could laugh at her.

In her confusion she banged the keys and said, "Love? I don't believe in love. It's mockery, and if that's all I am made for it's too bad."

Now she was flinging herself on the chintz covered bed. Fool. Now he could laugh at her. Would he come to the door? Try and say something to her? Knock at the door gently? No. He was playing the piano. Unconcerned. Heartless. Oh, the irony of it. And once she had thought him a sap. She fell asleep sobbing and hating her emotional outburst to the soft tones of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata."

He greeted her at breakfast the next morning smiling in his lazy and debonair manner, just as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

Marcita controlled her feelings with difficulty. She had found little necessity in her life to do this. Yet she realized that if she didn't she would be utterly ridiculous. She didn't wish to be that, either. Being in love with a man who didn't care about her was a new and alien rôle and did not fit her becomingly.

THE time went by too quickly. She wondered vaguely what Reggie would do at the termination of the two weeks. He would take her back, but the thoughts of the crowd and the things she had always done to amuse herself were sickening now. Was love always like this? Painful. Each

hour seemingly pulled from her heart. Made aching by his indifference.

But a remnant of her pride still lived. She had planned her farewell speech, with her duchess manner, and she would go through with it!

Came the Sunday morning that they were to return to the Windy City. Now they were eating the last breakfast.

Unendurable, unbearable. Marcita automatically patted Zinzabald, who had jumped upon her lap.

"Who takes care of him when you are gone?" she inquired.

"My housekeeper."

Housekeeper? Perhaps more than that. The jealousy which welled in her heart told in her voice.

"Oh! Your—housekeeper."

"Your face betrays your emotions too well, Marcita. She is fat, fair and past forty. The clothes could not possibly belong to her. She has been on a two weeks' vacation. She always goes early. She will be back sometime this afternoon, after we have gone."

After we have gone. Your face betrays your emotions. Oh, why did he have to be so cruel? So unkind? She bit her lip to hold it still.

"You don't want to go back, do you, Marcita?"

Oh, darn him. Well, she would show him. Now was the time for that perfect little speech.

"I certainly do. If—if your little melodrama is—is about over and I have served your purpose why—why—I—I—" She was all choky. Couldn't go on. Lost and all mixed up. Going to cry. Couldn't help it. Couldn't stop it, no matter what kind of a goof she made of herself.

Abruptly she dropped Zinzabald, unmindful of his resentful feline stare. Went in and buried her head in one of the barrel chairs.

Who would ever have thought that someone like Reggie could have made such a fool of someone like her?

HE was behind her chair now. She didn't see him, but she heard him.

"Marcita. Nice name. Makes one think of dancing Spanish maidens in a sun streaked patio. Poor little girl. Never loved anyone before, did she?"

"I—I—don't love anyone—now," she sobbed back.

"Yes you do, Marcita. You love me. Why deny it? Ashamed of it?"

"No. No. I mean you're crazy. G-go away."

"Yes, crazy, sweetheart. Crazy about you. Have been from the very beginning. But she's such a little baby she doesn't even know that."

She uncovered her head and looked at him. She wasn't very big. Reggie was notoriously slim. The barrel chair was fat. So he lolled into the other half of it in his usual easy manner and playfully pushed a finger against the reddened-from-weeping pug nose.

"Silly baby. Why do you suppose I brought you here in the first place?"

"To study me like a bug or something so I could get into your old novel."

"Silly some more. To study you, yes. All men want to study the woman they love and hope to make their wife. But I haven't had a chance to begin, Cita. It will take a whole lifetime. Can you imagine the dumb bozo I made of myself for six months, just to be near you, and now you say I don't care!"

"But—you—you said you didn't l-love me."

"I know. Didn't mean it, though. You were so dissatisfied and mixed up you had to have time to find yourself.

If I hadn't play-acted, how do you think you could have found we were meant for each other?"

"Oh!" It was a strangely relieved little "Oh!" Her head was resting on his shoulder now. She reached up and touched his face. "Oh, Reggie. You're wonderful. I—I—"

"Say it, Cita. I've waited so long to hear it."

"I—I—love you."

Now everything was silent in the early American barrel chair. Half of it had again become vacant.

Then Marcita remembered the clothes. She straightened up in his arms.

"Whose clothes are they? I won't marry you unless you tell me all about your past."

"Honey, I haven't any past. Those clothes are yours."

"Mine?"

"Yes. Didn't they seem to fit perfectly?"

"Yes, but why—mine?"

"I expected to bring you here unexpectedly. I realized what it meant to a girl like you to be well dressed while falling in love. So I picked out the clothes ahead of time."

"You wonderful presumptuous man. Next I suppose you will bring out the license and a wedding ring. Have you a little minister concealed in the grand piano?"

His face fell. "Gee, I did forget the minister. But the wedding ring and license are here."

Whereby he produced them both! To her consternation and pleased surprise.

"I never knew anyone to take so much for granted," she said lovingly, fingering the diamond wedding ring.

"But it's a nice license signed with regular Palmer penmanship, and you do like the ring."

"Yes," she whispered and snuggled back into his arms contentedly. "I was tired of them, Reggie. The crowd. I'm happy now."

"I knew you were tired of them. Knew you needed me. I think if we try hard enough we could find a minister to-day. Do you want to, honey?"

"Do I? This will be a wonderful place for a honeymoon."

That called for another kiss. She reached up and touched the nondescript blond hair.

"It's wonderful belonging to someone. I have something to live for now, dear. You."

"Kayoh," said Reggie and laughed his villainous laugh.

Just the thing for your bedroom or study wall! Collect ten reader's choice coupons (there is one on page 158), send them in and get an original illustration free! Just tell us which one you have liked best and it will be forwarded to you.

The Stronger Current

His head appeared above the water—too far for Joan to reach with the broomstick!

Joan's heart was adrift on a turbulent tide, houseboating toward heaven

By Eleanor Hammond

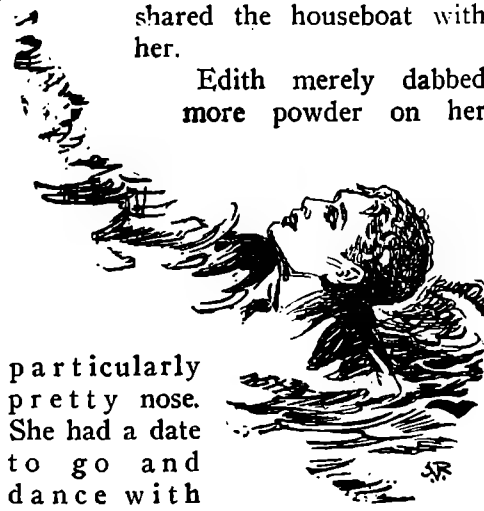
FOR a month Joan Barton had been humming and hammering about the houseboat and feeling thoroughly delighted. It was the nearest thing to a home she had known for many years—and Joan longed for a home. She was naturally a domestic little person, though she had experienced very little domesticity in her twenty-one years.

This evening, however, the houseboat was causing Joan misgivings. Of course, it was not exactly the houseboat's fault. The weather was behaving like anything but May, and the swollen river was flooding down toward the Sound, brown and turgid and full of floating driftwood.

The houseboat had cause to rock. The rain drummed on the low roof as if it intended to come through the painted canvas.

"I don't see why you want to go out on such a rainy night!" Joan said to Edith Crawford, who shared the houseboat with her.

Edith merely dabbed more powder on her particularly pretty nose. She had a date to go and dance with Jimmy Slater.



"I'd just as lief be out in the rain on firm ground as in this houseboat!"

she laughed. "Besides, Jimmy will have his coupé right at the head of the moorage stairs."

Edith departed, holding to Jimmy's arm and walking very close to that good-looking young man. Of course, the moorage walk was slippery and they had only one umbrella.

Joan gave a little sigh as she closed the door. Nearly every evening Edith went out somewhere—and nearly every evening Joan stayed home.

It had been good enough fun staying home so long as there were things to do, getting settled in the houseboat. But now the furnishing was complete, from the ruffled curtains at the bedroom window to the brass tea kettle on top of the heating stove.

"And I just love the place!" Joan told herself. "It's the nicest home I ever had! So much nicer than an ordinary apartment—"

For a moment Joan's heart reminded her that it took more than ruffled curtains and brass tea kettles to make a real home.

Joan gave another very small sigh and glanced at herself in the mirror on the coat closet door. It was a rather charming face that she saw there, though not striking like Edith's blonde beauty.

"I suppose it's natural Edith should have all the beaux," Joan told herself. "Just the same—I wish—" Joan's gray eyes took on the dreamy look that used to come into them when she was a small girl and said, "Let's pretend—"

"I WISH," the girl said mentaliy, "there would be a knock at the door—and outside would be a tall young man with awfully broad shoulders and twinkly blue eyes and a lot of curly yellow hair—"

Joan laid a hand over her lips.

"I'd better give him dark hair and brown eyes!" her conscience suggested. "But I won't change his shoulders! I won't!"

The young man who had just moved into the houseboat half way up the moorage had yellow-brown hair and twinkly blue eyes. He also had a wife and baby!

"I do love sunlight on yellowy-brown hair, though!" Joan thought wistfully. "I should love to run my fingers through hair like that."

"You should *not* have smiled at that young man when you passed him on the moorage walk this morning!" conscience reproved her. "You *knew* he was married!"

Joan gave a small jump. She listened hard. Yes, there certainly was some one knocking at the houseboat door!

The knock was repeated, louder this time. The sort of knock that only a very strong person would give.

Joan tiptoed toward the door and gave a tiny gasp as she opened it.

She was looking up into the face of a tall young man with twinkly blue eyes and very broad shoulders! Even under his rain-soaked hat, Joan could see that he had yellow-brown hair.

It was impossible to keep from answering his smile with a smile. "Anyhow, *he* smiled first this time!" Joan quietly reassured herself.

"I beg your pardon," the young man was saying, in a voice that just fitted his shoulders and the twinkle in his eyes. "Can you tell me where the Bruces live?"

Joan shook her dark little head. Then she found breath enough to say: "I—I don't know any one of that name! Perhaps they're further down the moorage. I don't know many of

the people's names. We've only lived here a few weeks ourselves!"

"Send him along at once!" Joan's conscience said sternly. "Don't ask him in out of the rain! Never mind if he is the best looking man in the world! Never mind if his smile makes your heart turn somersaults! It wouldn't do you the least good to get acquainted with him! Besides, you're no good at vamping men!"

BUT Joan's eyes glanced at the cozy, warm living room of the houseboat. It seemed fairly begging for a young man with very broad shoulders to sit in the biggest chair by the stove and dry his shoes at the fire.

"It's very wet outside—if you'd care to come in for a minute by the fire?—" Joan's lips said.

The young man's smile broadened. "That's awfully kind of you! I am soaked!"

He moved in the direction which Joan's eyes pointed. He had a very big stride.

"I have that address written down somewhere!" He stood by the stove and fumbled in a pocket among papers. Somehow, he didn't seem in any particular hurry to discover the address. He sank into the chair Joan offered and stretched his very long legs toward the stove.

"What a cozy little place you have here!" he remarked. His blue eyes took in the details of Joan's housekeeping appreciatively. "Your husband's a lucky dog to have this to come home to."

Joan flushed a sea shell pink. "I—I haven't any husband!" she confessed. "Just a girl friend, who shares the houseboat with me. We work in the same office."

For an instant the young man's eyes rested on his small shy hostess instead of upon the room. Joan felt herself turning even pinker under his scrutiny.

The visitor looked away and began sorting the papers in his pocket once more. Then he rose and held one of them under the lamp.

"I guess this is it. I knew I had that address on one of these envelopes!"

There was a moment of silence. Joan sought desperately for something to say. Her heart was going flippety-flop so rapidly that it seemed to leave her no breath for talking. The young man's twinkly blue eyes were looking into hers, with a half question in them.

Joan led the way toward the door.

"Do houseboats always rock like this?" he was asking. "I could imagine I was back at sea to-night!"

"Not always," Joan managed to say. "It's just the spring high water, I believe."

THE light from the room streamed across the tiny porch as Joan opened the door. "Look out for that gangplank! It's slippery when it rains!" she warned.

"He's going! Really going! And you may never see him again!" Joan's heart cried. "Can't you say something to keep him? Can't you ask him back in? It was so grand having him sit there in the biggest chair—just as if he really belonged here! Don't let him go!"

"Don't be foolish—and improper!" her conscience replied sharply. "What right have you to keep him here, while his wife is waiting for him this very minute! And of course you'll see him! He lives in the same moorage! You're bound to meet him sometimes—more's the pity!"

"Look out for that gangplank! It

isn't very wide!" Joan's lips told the young man.

He was not looking at the gangplank. He was looking straight into the girl's eyes, buttoning his overcoat about his neck and thanking her.

"Good-by—" Joan held out one slim little hand. It was almost lost in his strong brown fingers.

Somehow they were still holding each other's hands when he stepped from the porch. They were still looking into each other's faces.

Suddenly Joan gave a startled cry. Their fingers had parted with curious suddenness. There was a splash in the dark water.

"You missed that plank!"

Joan stared at the river. The young man's yellow-brown head had disappeared below its surface. His felt hat was floating off down the current.

Joan looked about wildly for something to help in rescuing him. She seized the broom. She would give it to him to hold on to when he came up again. He ought to be there close to the gangplank.

Then Joan gave another cry. The gangplank was gone!

His head bobbed into view, down stream, too far off for Joan to reach him with the broomstick.

"This way! Can you swim?" Joan screamed to him.

IT was too dim, down there where the current was carrying him, to see how he was getting along. Joan herself could not swim. She gave a frightened sob, screamed for somebody to come and help. The wind carried her words away into the rainy night.

"I've got to get help! He may drown!" Joan's heart cried. "Where are you? Swim this way!" she called desperately.

There was no answer. The young man seemed to have disappeared entirely.

Suddenly Joan caught her breath. She had been plunged into complete darkness.

It was not that she had fallen into the river, she realized. She was still crouching at the edge of the houseboat porch. It was that the light from the living room had suddenly gone out. All the lights in the moorage had gone out!

"Oh, where are you? Can you hear me?" Joan called.

There was no answer. It seemed there was no sound in the whole world except the rush of wind and rain and lapping waves.

"I've got to do something! Something to save *him!*" the girl sobbed. She had no thoughts for anything else. "I can't do anything in the dark—the power must have gone off! There are some candles on the bookcase—"

Joan groped her way indoors and managed to get one of the candles lighted. It was blown out the moment she ventured back on the porch with it. Joan's mind was working desperately.

"Maybe if I put it in a pail or something—"

The rays of the improvised lantern streamed across the porch in the direction of the moorage walk.

"I wonder if I can jump that space!" Joan was thinking rapidly. "I've got to get somebody—somebody who can swim or who has a boat—"

THEN she stared, breathless, at the place where the moorage walk should have been. *There was nothing in sight but hurrying black water!* At the same moment, the wind blew out her flickering light again.

"Oh, dear!" Joan spoke aloud in her alarm. "Can the houseboat have broken loose from the moorage!"

"I'm afraid that is just what has happened!" A reply came out of the blackness, surprisingly near to Joan.

There was no use looking round, in such darkness. But Joan's heart began to beat hard. "Where—where are you?" she cried. "Oh, you are safe then?"

The voice which answered was unquestionably that of the young man with broad shoulders and yellow-brown hair. Joan knew she couldn't be mistaken. She gave a sob of relief.

"Where are you?"

"As nearly as I can judge, in the coal cellar!" There was a little ring of laughter in the man's voice, even at that moment.

Joan felt her way toward the big closet off the porch which was used for fuel storage. Her groping hand came against a very damp shirt front. Somehow, both she and the owner of the shirt front laughed. Then they were clinging to each other as if they were afraid the river might sweep them away.

"I'm so—glad! So glad you're safe!" Joan sobbed, half laughing.

"So am I!" the man admitted. "It seemed wiser to get aboard your houseboat than to let it sail over me."

Somewhere in the distance behind them were sounds of excited voices and of timbers crashing.

"I wonder if the whole moorage is being carried away!" Joan cried anxiously.

"If it is, we're lucky to have a head start of the other wreckage!" said the man, whose arm was about her.

On the river banks lights came into view and were left behind. It was plain the houseboat was moving rapidly on the flood waters! Joan and her companion stood staring at the banks going by.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish!" the man said. He still circled the girl protectingly with one strong arm. "We seem to be rapidly houseboating toward heaven! Where does this river go, anyhow?"

"Down to the Sound—and that empties into the Pacific, of course!" Joan replied. "But that's ever so many miles."

THE lights of the city were receding aft at an alarming rate.

"I don't suppose this houseboat has an anchor—or any way of steering it?" the man inquired.

"I never wanted to steer it before!" Joan felt suddenly apologetic about the houseboat's shortcomings. "Houseboats aren't supposed to go to sea this way!"

He laughed in a way that made Joan feel sure the twinkle was in his blue eyes.

"Well, I suppose we aren't in any great danger at present!" he reassured her. "The river is wide and we'll probably run ashore somewhere before we reach the ocean. If we just had some sort of light to signal any boats that happen to pass—"

"I think there's an old lantern somewhere in that coal closet!" Joan said.

Somehow, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to be hunting for matches and lanterns with Dave—that was his name, Joan learned in an interval between attempts to light the lantern and to improvise some method of steering their unwieldy craft.

It seemed quite natural, too, to be scolding him in to the fire to dry himself and insisting upon making hot

cocoa on top of the heater, to warm him.

"You look as wet as a drowned rat!" Joan laughed as she scanned him by the light of the bookcase candles. "You *must* get dry!"

The twinkle was brighter than ever in Dave's eyes. "Don't you think you're sort of small, to be bossing me round like this?"

He looked down at Joan and his grin was delightfully boyish.

THE hours that followed were a strange mixture of excitement, terror and happiness. It was happiness, in spite of everything, to be with Dave, to watch him and to hear his voice.

"Even if there is such a thing as love at first sight—it hasn't anything to do with a plain little person like you and a young man who already has a wife!" Joan's conscience reminded her.

Mentally Joan stuffed her fingers in her ears to keep out such remarks. It isn't my fault that the flood carried us away together like this!" Joan reminded her conscience. "And he is wonderful! Just wonderful!"

There was no denying that Dave was intelligent and energetic as well as handsome. He was full of practical ideas and seemed to know just what ought to be done with a runaway houseboat. Even when a bridge pier loomed suddenly close ahead, he managed to steer the houseboat round it. He whittled a sort of oar from an extra plank he discovered in the fuel closet. Joan watched him with eyes wide with admiration.

"It's horribly late!" Dave said at last. "And there's no use our both staying up all night. You'd better go to bed, Joan! I'll call you if we manage to make a landing anywhere."

Joan closed the door of her bedroom reluctantly.

"You must be alive! I love you! Nothing else matters!"

"You'll probably not see much of him after you're rescued," Joan's heart whispered; "maybe you oughtn't to stop looking at him for a single minute."

Through the door Joan could hear him whistling something that sounded like "Home, Sweet Home"—but Dave was less good at carrying a tune than at most things, it seemed.

"He's the grandest man in the world just the same!" Joan insisted. "And I never was so happy—in—my life!" —which was a rather inappropriate sentiment for a young woman who was being carried down a flooded river in

an unseaworthy houseboat to an unknown fate.

DAVE'S prophecy that they would drift ashore before morning was not fulfilled. Gray waters and circling sea gulls were all that Joan saw out of her window when she woke next morning.

She found Dave on the porch scanning the watery horizon. A ray of sunlight between the clouds touched his hair to gold. He turned a warm, friendly smile toward Joan as she joined him.

"We've done some traveling since we started, I judge!" he remarked.

"Why, we must be out in the Sound somewhere!" Joan cried.

"And a long way from food and fresh water!" Dave said. "The water and gas connections snapped, of course, when the houseboat broke loose."

"Just the same, we're going to have breakfast!" Joan laughed. "There'll be water enough in the tea kettle for coffee and I can cook on the heating stove a little."

She bustled about, opening some of her special strawberry jam for Dave's toast, making coffee and scrambling eggs. The meal she spread was tempting and sufficient.

Dave smacked his lips over it. "If the supplies would only hold out, I shouldn't mind taking quite a cruise—with you, Joan!" Dave said.

Her eyes dropped before his. But when she glanced at Dave again, his face had lost its carefree expression.

"Is—something wrong?"

"I hope not!" Dave smiled at her once more, but his eyes seemed to be gazing a long way off. "I was just wondering—if anything worse than this could have happened—to the family—back at the moorage!"

Somehow Joan had forgotten that the man sitting across the breakfast table from her had a family. The remembrance stabbed her.

A tear dropped into Dave's empty coffee cup as she carried it toward the kitchenette.

LATER, Dave's concern seemed to have vanished. He was busy rigging up a signal flag for the "rescue ship," whistling somewhat out of tune, but very merrily.

"I wonder if—he doesn't care about his wife—really!" Joan thought for a moment.

"Stop entertaining such ideas this minute! Even if he doesn't, he's *hers*—not *yours!*" Joan's conscience scolded her sharply.

The "rescue ship" was long in appearing. Once a fishing launch went by on the horizon, but it was too far off for the men aboard to notice Dave's distress signal.

Morning lengthened into afternoon and Joan insisted upon Dave lying down on the couch to get some sleep, after his all-night vigil.

"There isn't anything either of us can do until a boat comes near enough to see us or until we drift near land!" Joan pointed out. "I'll watch on the porch and call you if anything happens!"

Nothing did happen for a very long while. Once Joan tiptoed into the darkened living room and spread another blanket over Dave. He looked very like a tired little boy as he lay sleeping with his unruly yellow-brown curls straggling over his forehead and one arm tossed across the pillows above his head.

"You might kiss him—ever so softly! He's so sound asleep he would never know!" Joan's heart whispered.

"You mustn't do anything of the sort! Put your hand over your lips and go back to the porch this minute!" Joan's conscience reproved her. "You mustn't think of kissing even one little wavy curl!"

Joan sighed as she sat down on the porch bench once more. The gray clouds were rolling away as huge white mountains of vapor, and there was a rainbow off across the water, but Joan had no heart to enjoy this beauty. The sunset sky was like a banded agate of red and amber. Joan sat with her chin on her hunched knees and watched it with unseeing eyes.

"Why—why did he have to be so wonderful—and belong to somebody else!" she wondered. "But I know—he likes me!"

THE winds and the mysterious crisscross currents of the Sound were drawing the houseboat along hour after hour. Perhaps if Joan had not been thinking so much about Dave, she might have noticed the island sooner.

As it was, the wind swung the unwieldy craft almost under its rocky cliffs before Joan saw the little piece of land, jutting out of the Sound waters.

Joan jumped to her feet. "I suppose I'd better wake Dave!"

She shook his shoulders gently. "We're in sight of land! I think it's an island! There are lots and lots of islands in the Sound, you know!"

Dave sat up, rubbed his eyes sleepily. Finally he spoke.

"Well, I hope there's fresh water on it—or that it's a part of the mainland!" He strode out to the porch to look at the prospect. "If it's mainland, that means our troubles are about over!" he added cheerfully.

For a moment Joan's face went white. Was Dave so eager to be rescued? Rescue meant their parting!

He was intent upon getting the houseboat to the land. It seemed as if the tricky currents were going to carry them on past the island.

"And there's the darlingest little beach with white sand!" Joan cried as they came close enough to make out the landscape.

"There seems to be a stream running across that beach—which means fresh water!" Dave said.

He struggled to steer the houseboat with the improvised oar. It was a difficult business.

"But we are going to get there! We are!" Joan cried at last. "Oh Dave, you're wonderful!"

"Let's hitch the clothesline to the porch post and use it for a tow rope!" Dave suggested. "I think I can wade ashore from here!"

He splashed into the water like a spaniel and tied the other end of the clothesline to a huge drift log on the beach.

Then he carried Joan ashore in his arms, wading through the shallow water.

"I call this desert-islanding in style—bringing our whole house with us!" Dave laughed to the girl in his arms. "Even the Swiss Family Robinson didn't do as well as that!"

JOAN'S gray eyes shone like stars as she looked up into his. She could hardly find breath enough to say, "Let's have a bonfire and a picnic supper on the beach! Oh, isn't this fun, Dave?"

She ran along the beach collecting driftwood for the fire, helping Dave find a board large enough to use for a gangplank from the houseboat to the shore, helping prepare the supper.

"This is the most heavenly place I've ever been in my life!" Joan stood looking at the silvery arc of the moon rising out of the misty waters.

The moon was silvery bright in the sky as Joan and Dave sat beside their driftwood fire after supper. Their talk died down like the many-colored flames from the driftwood. Moonlight and the soft lapping of the waves on the sand filled the night and made all the rest of the world seem very far away.

The night was mysteriously still and soft about them, and for a while Joan forgot everything, except that she was happy and that Dave was sitting very close to her.

Her eyes followed a flight of sparks up dreamily toward the stars. "Isn't the world beautiful?"

Dave's voice had an odd, deep note in it as he replied, "The most beautiful thing in it is—*you*, Joan!"

Suddenly Joan felt his arms about her. Dave's lips were very close to hers. Dave was kissing her lips, her hair, her throat.

She could not pull herself away from him. She clung to Dave—and nothing else seemed the least bit important

"Joan, girl," Dave was whispering, "I love you! I love you! I've known a lot of girls, but I never knew what love could mean until I met you, honey!"

JOAN knew she must pull herself away; she couldn't let Dave go on! She had no right to let him say even this much.

"You mustn't!" the girl sobbed. "Let me go! Let me go!" You mustn't take advantage—of our being here alone—"

Suddenly Dave's arms released her. Joan sobbed hysterically. She wanted,

He carried her ashore in his arms, while she trembled with happiness

oh, so much, to throw her arms about Dave, to kiss away that hurt look on his face. But—

"Your wife—" Joan couldn't say those words.

Suddenly she turned and fled down the beach, across the gangplank, into her bedroom in the houseboat. She locked the door behind her and flung herself, weeping, on the bed. All the happiness in the world had been blotted out, like a black cloud in front of the moon.

After a while she heard footsteps in the other room and a tap on the door.

"Joan! Please, Joan!" Dave called to her.

"Go away! P l e a s e — leave me alone!" Joan moaned.

His voice came through the panels, muffled and pleading. "Forgive me, Joan! I didn't mean to frighten you! I was carried away— You were so lovely, so little and trusting and dear, there in my arms—"

Joan could not answer. She sobbed miserably.

"I'll go back to the beach and stay there to-night!" Dave said after a while. "You mustn't be afraid of me, my dear!"

Dave's retreating steps echoed and died away.

Joan lay sobbing and shivering. "I'm glad he's gone!" she told herself. "If I heard his voice again—I'm afraid I'd have to go to him and throw my arms round his neck—"

She cried until she fell into an exhausted doze.

HER fitful sleep was broken at last by daylight streaming in through the window. Joan dragged herself from bed. How could she face Dave again in the pitiless daylight?

She looked toward the beach. Then her fingers tightened on the ruffled window curtains. Only an expanse of gray water met her eyes. The houseboat was rocking gently on the swell.

"That old clothesline must have broken when the tide changed!"

Joan remembered that Dave had spoken of making the houseboat faster when he could find a better tether for it. She hurried out to the porch. There was the island, small and far away.

"And Dave's back there without any food!"

It had been terrible to think about meeting Dave again—but not meeting, being torn apart thus, was much more terrible.

"I wonder if I can row this houseboat back!" It proved a heartbreaking task, trying to move the clumsy craft with the homemade oar. Joan's slim little arms soon ached—and she could not see that she was making any progress toward the island.

On the water, Joan caught sight of a dark bobbing object. It might be a piece of driftwood—and yet—

"It looks like some one swimming!" Joan thought.

Then she gave a stifled, frightened gasp. It was Dave's yellow-brown head there in the water!

"He must be a wonderful swimmer —but such a long way—and in such cold water—"

For the moment, Joan forgot everything except the danger of the man in the water—the man she loved!

It was plain enough that he was struggling hard to cover the remaining distance to the houseboat.

"If I only had a boat so I could go and meet him—" Joan thought miserably.

Dave's head had disappeared from sight under the water.

It reappeared again and the girl saw him wave to her. She heard him shout something. Then he went under once more.

"Oh, he mustn't d r o w n! He *mustn't!*" Joan wailed. "If only I could swim!"

She looked about desperately. It seemed like a miracle that a little salmon-fishing launch should be there in the offing. Joan waved wildly. She called until she was hoarse.

The men in the launch had really seen her! They were waving, turning their boat toward her!

But they were still some distance

away. Joan's eyes searched the surface of the water for the swimmer.

Her heart gave a throb of relief. He was still there! He had come up and was struggling slowly forward.

"Oh, my dear! My dear! Keep up just a minute longer! That launch is coming!" Joan cried to him.

She thought she could make out a smile on Dave's white face.

IT seemed like hours before the fishing launch reached the swimmer, before the fishermen were helping Dave out of the water.

"He's chilled and exhausted, miss! Better wrap him up and give him something hot to drink!"

The Scandinavian fisherman was a grizzled, fatherly man. He helped Joan get Dave to the couch, listened with a nod to her brief explanation of how they came to be there. "We'll tow you back to land, miss!" he said kindly.

Then Joan was alone again in the houseboat with Dave. She hurried to the couch. His face was gray-white, his eyes were closed.

"Dave! Dave, dearest!"

There was no answer to her words.

Joan made a frightened gesture and sank to her knees beside the couch. She laid her ear over Dave's heart. Could the exhaustion and chill have been too much?

"Oh, my dear! My dear!" the girl sobbed. "You *must* be—alive! I love you so much! I *can't* let you die!"

She laid her cheek against his cold one and circled his neck with her arms.

Dave's eyelids opened flutteringly. Joan felt his arm move and hold her.

"You're—all right!"

There was too much happiness in that fact for Joan to think of anything else for a minute.

Dave's laugh was a very weak one—but it was still a laugh.

"Of course I'm all right—if you love me, Joan!" he whispered. "That's enough to make me all right, honey!"

JOAN felt her cheeks turning sea-shell pink. "I thought—you were unconscious—" she murmured. Suddenly she remembered that she had no right to be there.

"I—didn't mean you to hear!" she said. "I do—care about you. But—I wouldn't steal any one's husband—"

Dave looked at her with a puzzled expression in his blue eyes. "But I'm not—any one's husband, honey!" he protested.

Her heart gave a sudden leap. She took Dave's outstretched hand in both hers and looked at him earnestly.

"But how could it be a mistake? I saw you—with your wife and baby—there at the moorage?"

Dave pulled the girl toward him.

"Not *my* wife and baby!" he assured her. "And I never was at the moorage except for a few minutes night before last when I came there looking for my brother and *his* wife and baby, who have just moved into a houseboat there. My brother and I look a lot alike—"

Joan hid her face against Dave's shoulder and cried suddenly. But she was crying for happiness.

"Darling! Darling!" Dave kissed her little dark head and held her very tenderly. "So that was why you wouldn't let me make love to you? You thought I was—somebody's husband!"

Dave lifted her face and kissed her lips very tenderly. It was a rather solemn kiss.

"Joan, dear," he said, "I'd like to be *somebody's* husband—if *somebody* will have me!"

The count kissed her hand, tenderly, adoringly

"Chérie, Je T'Aime"

It may be in French or American, but, however you spell it, it means the biggest thing in life!

By Dorothy Dayton

Author of "Saturday Night and No Date"

ARDIS PENROSE wanted to pinch herself to see if she really were awake. It had been so ever since that never-to-be-forgotten day last spring when she had received Aunt Gloria's letter, asking her to come abroad to live for a time. And here she was, on the train from Paris to Biarritz, her snappy little bag fairly bursting with French lingerie, French perfumes, and French frocks, bought so thrillingly on the Rue de la Paix.

It was difficult to realize that three months ago she had been a librarian in Quincy, Illinois, feeling very sad because stodgy but successful George Everest had married another girl. Why, she wouldn't even look, now, at any man as unromantic as George; for wasn't she on her way to glittering Biarritz, to be a guest at the villa of Count Piseto of Rome, who had paid her marked attentions?

Ardis couldn't help turning from time to time to catch a reflected glimpse of herself in the car window.

For Paris and Aunt Gloria had changed just an ordinary pretty American girl into one of those smart and alluring Frenchwomen whom Ardis had so envied and admired when she went with Aunt Gloria to tea in the Bois. More lip stick, practically no rouge, the new dark powder, a faint touch of eye shadow over her dark eyes, and the dark hair brushed away from her forehead, showing her beautifully arched eyebrows from under the new off-the-forehead Agnès turban—all this, with her trim new bottle-green frock and curious jade earrings, had turned the trick.

Moreover, having changed outwardly, she felt inwardly changed, too. In Quincy she had been considered staid and a little shy—not one of those dashing girls men turn to look at in the street, like the Phipps girl, who had walked away with George. Now she felt vibrant, daring, romantic; and it was in this mood that her eyes encountered another pair of eyes, reflected in the window glass, and a sleek dark head.

Ardis was so startled that she turned quickly, without realizing it, and looked squarely into a pair of laughing hazel eyes that held hers with a direct and quizzical look—eyes that held hers for what seemed to Ardis an infinite lapse of time. She felt the color mounting to her throat and cheeks. With a desperate effort she managed to withdraw her eyes from the stranger's intent gaze and glance out of the window once more—there only to meet it again.

"I won't look! I won't look!" she said to herself.

So she studied the tips of her smart bottle-green slippers, toyed with her bag, and then found a French novel, which she pretended to read—a vain pretense, for the words conveyed nothing to her brain.

He was very distinguished-looking, Ardis decided, and that was what she really liked in a man. That was why she had been so much attracted to Count Piseto. The count had worn a morning coat, striped trousers, and spats, and had carried a cane, when he came to call at Aunt Gloria's Paris apartment. His black hair was grayed at the temples. How drab all American business men were in comparison!

This young man across the aisle was likewise distinguished, like all high-class foreigners. She wondered what he was — French, Italian, or perhaps English. His eyes looked so dangerous and romantic!

After a while Ardis, drawn by an irresistible urge, risked one more thrilling look; but her eyes fluttered away as soon as she found that he was looking, too. It made her dizzy.

So the train whistled on toward Biarritz, and perfectly good time was lost, all because Ardis, even in her French clothes, couldn't forget that she was a well-brought-up American girl and must wait for young men to make the first advances. She began to feel deeply dejected. She couldn't let this man walk out of her life like this, conventions or no conventions; and apparently he was too well-bred to pick up an acquaintance with a strange woman on the train, unless she indicated very plainly that she didn't mind. Yet that might cheapen her in his eyes.

Then she had a real inspiration. She scribbled on a piece of paper.

"BIARRITZ!" shouted the attendant.

The station flashed into view, her bags were being carried out. She heard the distinguished-looking

young man talking to the attendant—in French. Of course he was French, with those eyes! Apparently he, too, was leaving the train at Biarritz. With cheeks flushed, but looking very dignified, and with eyes straight ahead, Ardis marched proudly past him, but from one hand fluttered a bit of white paper, and on it was written a single word, "Ninon," with's the count's address.

"And that ought to knock him for a row," thought Ardis proudly. "I'm glad I made him think I was French. If he has an ounce of romance, he'll find his lost Ninon somehow!"

At the station there was waiting for her a long-limbed Hispano-Suiza in a soft shade of green, which looked as if it had been designed to match her dazzling self. Behind the liveried chauffeur were her aunt and poor withered old Uncle William, and, rushing forward to greet her, none other than the distinguished Count Piseto himself.

Out of the tail of her eye Ardis saw, to her supreme satisfaction, that a very dazed-looking young man was taking it all in. She could hardly keep her mind on the count's compliments.

"*Très, très Parisienne!*" he said, taking her by both hands, his eyes sweeping from the smart little hat down to the tips of her green slippers. "Some day you will be talked about as the smartest and most beautiful woman on the continent!"

Ardis smiled her delight. A compliment from the count was nothing to be sneezed at. He knew all the smartest women in Europe. Visions of life in this romantic country, Rome in winter, the Lido, Biarritz, Switzerland, the Riviera in "the season," danced through her mind; and Paris clothes always. Life would be like heaven. She hoped never to see Quincy, Illinois, again.

THE days that followed were like a dream to Ardis — Count Piseto's villa, with its red roof and dazzling white walls flashing against a gray sea; the drives along the rocky coast in the luxurious green car, which proved to be Uncle William's, not the count's; and glorious Biarritz itself, with its sharp white cliffs, its rocky promontories beyond the sandy beaches, its Casino, its gay restaurants, and the terrace, where, during the *apéritif* hour, before dinner, one saw gorgeously gowned women of every nationality, with distinguished, sophisticated-looking men.

There were several other guests at the villa, but none of them very interesting, Ardis thought, and all of them older than herself. However, every one made a great fuss over the American girl, and there was something to do every minute, with mornings and afternoons spent on the beach, under gayly striped umbrellas, or swimming; then tea or an *apéritif* on the terrace overlooking the sea; then dressing for dinner, and spending the evening in some gay place to dance, or watching the men and women at the Casino.

The only disappointment was that Ardis had not heard from the young man on the train. It made her rather furious, after she had made the advance. She should have known better, of course. No telling what sort of riff-raff he might be, after all.

Even if he didn't know her real name, he could have found her if he had any enterprise. He had the count's address.

Whenever she saw a pair of broad shoulders and a sleek, dark head, her

heart seemed to miss a beat. Subconsciously she was always on the lookout for him, no matter how gayly she might be listening to Count Piseto. Ardis was almost sorry that she had the stranger in mind so constantly, for she had quite made up her mind to marry the count if he should ask her. It was a future no girl in her senses from Quincy, Illinois, could well reject.

THEN came the moonlight walk with the count on one of the terraced promontories that overlook the bay at Biarritz, under strange trees whose drooping branches looked like fronded plumes. They stood facing the sea, watching the glinted path that ran out to meet the crescent moon. Count Piseto took Ardis's hand, kissed it passionately, and held it to his breast.

"*La mia colomba!*" he called her. "My dove—my beautiful, beautiful Ardis! Your eyes are so wide and mysterious, I wonder always what exquisite thoughts lie behind them; yet so alive and vibrant. You are the radiant answer to all my dreams of women. With you life would always be a poem—a poem set to music—"

His cultivated voice trailed on. He told her how cynical he had become; how different she was from most women; how she could inspire a man, and once more make him dream.

Then he kissed her, ever and ever so adoringly and respectfully, and told her that he intended to speak to Aunt Gloria in the morning.

Ardis was thrilled and elated. At last, she felt, she had found a man who could appreciate her—who loved her for herself—her soul. She would have gone to bed to dream of a thrilling life as Countess Piseto, had they not gone back to the Casino.

Roulette fascinated the count, and he could not for long keep his mind from the gaming tables, where, the last few evenings, he had happened to be more than usually successful. His gambling, for that was what it seemed to Ardis, worried her a little; but she supposed that it was what all smart and sophisticated foreigners did, and she was eager not to appear American and prudish. To-night Aunt Gloria was playing, too, even though Uncle William had cautioned her that she was losing too much, and that he didn't approve of it, anyway.

Suddenly, as Ardis stood absorbed in the spinning disks, she turned, drawn by a strange and irresistible impulse, to find herself gazing once more into the fascinating eyes of the young man whom she had seen on the train. Once more she had the curious feeling that whole eternities passed before she could summon strength to look away—that things reeled and spun about her, and that every nerve in her body quivered.

In a moment the tall, handsome young man was at her side, addressing her, in French, as "Ninon."

"I thought I had lost you," he said. "I have looked everywhere for you."

Ardis scarcely knew what she answered. Never before, not even on the terrace walk with the count, had she felt so strangely excited; but she noticed that the count was raking in his winnings and watching her, and that Aunt Gloria was coming toward them.

"I can't talk here," she replied in her best French, her mind working with lightning rapidity; "but I'll meet you on the terrace of the Hôtel Anglais to-morrow evening at nine."

"Don't forget, Ninon," the young man whispered into her ear, his hazel eyes dazzlingly close. "I have dreamed

about you every night for two weeks. I love you!"

"*Je t'aime!*" Yes, that was what this brazen young man had said—this brazen young man with the beautiful eyes, and a strange, magnetic attraction; and in French the words sounded much more thrilling than they ever had sounded in English. Ardis stood like one in a trance until Aunt Gloria's hand closed around her arm.

"Who was that young man, Ardis?" she asked, a disapproving note in her voice. "You might have introduced him."

"Oh—oh, just a young man I happened to meet on shipboard—a perfectly nice young man."

"Over here young girls don't do unconventional things. You have to be very careful whom you talk to," the older woman answered firmly.

Count Piseto came up with inquiringly raised eyebrows, but Ardis ventured no explanation. They drove home through the moonlight, Ardis seated between her aunt and the count, and all the way he held her hand in his; but her thoughts were not on him, nor even on the future Countess Piseto, but on a strange young man who had said in French that he loved her.

SHORTLY after luncheon next day Aunt Gloria, with a rather flustered and very important air, called Ardis into her little private sitting room. Ardis had never seen her look so much pleased with herself.

"I have something very important to talk with you about," she began impressively. "You have taken to this life as if you were bred to it. It is quite remarkable, I think, and I am very proud of you. You can become a very distinguished woman, and achieve a high place in the social life of the continent. In fact"—she paused impressively—"Count Piseto has asked my permission to marry you."

"I thought maybe he would," replied Ardis, a little too calmly to please Aunt Gloria.

"Don't you realize what that means to you? A title, social position—everything. I can hardly believe in such good fortune!"

"I believe you're more excited than I am," said Ardis, taking a perverse pleasure in teasing her aunt. The girl was grateful, but she could never feel a really warm affection for this rather austere and ambitious aunt of hers, whom she had not seen since childhood. "I'll have to have a little while to think it over."

Aunt Gloria looked positively annoyed.

"I think you should decide now," she told her niece. "You are not likely ever again to have such a brilliant opportunity. Besides, you certainly do not want to go back to Quincy, Illinois, and work in the library until you're a withered old maid, or marry some stodgy Middle Western business man and settle down to housekeeping and babies, do you?"

"No," Ardis replied soberly. "No, this is the most thrilling thing that ever has happened to me—this trip. I'd like to live here forever; and American men do seem flat and uninteresting after—"

She paused. She was thinking of a young Frenchman with fascinating eyes, who had whispered:

"*Je t'aime!*"

"That's a sensible girl," said Aunt Gloria, as if it were settled.

"Oh, but, Aunt Gloria, please, please, don't settle anything yet!" Ardis pleaded. "Wait until to-morrow morning. Then I think I'll say yes,

but I have to think it over. Besides," she added in a flash of inspiration, "I'd hate to say yes so suddenly. The count might consider me too anxious, and think that I'm one of these title-seeking American girls. I wouldn't have him think that for anything!"

"Well, that's an idea, too," the older woman said. "I must give you credit for brains, Ardis. Naturally my heart is very much set on this; but, as you say, it may be just as well to seem a little hesitant."

All that afternoon Ardis's brain was in a turmoil. It would be thrilling to be the Countess Piseto, and spend her life in Europe, and have everything she wanted. Besides, if she displeased Aunt Gloria, she couldn't stay at Biarritz. She would have to cut her visit short and go back to Quincy, Illinois, and the humdrum library. No, she couldn't do that!

This handsome Frenchman — probably he didn't mean anything by what he said, but still—at any rate she must see him just once. She must! Count Piseto was a distinguished man; but, after all, no one ever had thrilled her like this before, and after her matter-of-fact twenty years in Quincy she would have this one thrill, she thought, before she became a countess.

That afternoon she pleaded a headache, and by evening she sent word to the count that she was much worse, and couldn't possibly go out. He sent her flowers and was very solicitous. He was bitterly disappointed, he said, that she could not attend the dinner that Aunt Gloria was giving at one of the large hotels, for he had hoped to announce their engagement.

When the party had left, it was a palpitant and excited Ardis that leaned from the window to assure herself that they really were gone, and the way was clear for her great adventure. Yet she had misgivings, and once or twice she almost decided not to go at all.

"He'll probably think I am an adventuress," Ardis said to herself. "These Frenchmen! There's no telling what he may do, and it may end very unpleasantly after all."

Nevertheless, even while she was debating the question, she tried on one dress after another, her face flushed and her eyes shining. She wanted to look very romantic. Finally she chose a pale yellow chiffon, with a fluttery skirt and scarf.

THE Hôtel Anglais is a small hotel facing the sea, a little removed from the more glamorous night life of Biarritz, with a conservative English clientèle. It fronts upon the terraced walk where she had been with the count the night before.

Sure enough, the stranger was waiting for her, as she knew he would be. He was, in fact, pacing the veranda impatiently when she stepped out of the taxicab, for she had purposely kept him waiting ten minutes. Smilingly they greeted each other, both too excited to say much, and walked down to the shining sea. There they stood watching the gleaming path that ran out to meet the moon.

"If you had not come to-night I should have died," the young man said in French. "I have done nothing but dream of you every night for two weeks. I have inquired at the villa for Mlle. Ninon, but the servant assured me that there was no one there of that name."

"I am living very quietly," Ardis replied in her best French. "I have left orders not to be disturbed. I supposed you might write. I—it was very impulsive."

This evidently intrigued the young man's interest, Ardis could see. She wanted to seem very mysterious, and, with the count and the villa as a background, it was not difficult.

"Ah, but I have suffered these two weeks," he told her; "but I knew I should find you somewhere, even if I had to search the whole world over. Do you believe in love at first sight?"

Ardis turned a grave little face to his, and nodded.

"Sometimes, *monsieur*," she said.

In spite of her effort to seem very gay and sophisticated, she looked so shy and serious that the young man suddenly found courage to do what he had been wanting to do since the first moment he saw her. He took her in his arms and kissed her. Ardis did not repulse him, for she had a feeling that this was destiny, that she could not have done otherwise if she had wanted to, and that this was the high moment to which all of her twenty years had been merely an uneventful prelude.

When they had kissed, and kissed again, they sat on a rock, overcome

He levelled something that flashed in the moonlight

with emotion, their hands clinging tenderly.

"Every man," he told her, "goes about this world searching for the girl of his dreams; and why should he not recognize her when he meets her? I have always felt sure that with the exchange of our first glance we should know each other."

How beautiful and poetic it all sounded in French, Ardis thought! Oh, how glad she was that she had studied French at home, had made translations in the library, and now could speak and understand it quite fluently! And how marvelously Frenchmen made love! No American man, she thought, could have spoken like this, or could have kissed her as this stranger did, without having it seem—well, a little foolish.

"This is the perfect romance as I dreamed it," Ardis told him. "I, too, felt that I should have recognized my love on sight. It is even more romantic that we should have recognized each other without either of us knowing the other's name or circumstances."

"And if we did know," the young man said, "that might shatter it, Ninon. Probably you are very rich, or titled, while I—"

"Nothing shall come between us," Ardis interrupted, "unless you will it."

"Then nothing ever shall," he vowed.

"Nevertheless," said Ardis tenderly, "now that we have found each other, I think I should know your name."

"And you are certain," he asked, "that it will make no difference?"

"It will make no difference," she replied. "How could it?"

"I hardly know how one would pronounce my name in French," he said. "You see I am an American, and in English we call it Harry Smith."

Ardis fairly bolted upright.

"For the love of Mike!" she exclaimed, forgetting her French. "Harry Smith!"

"Well, I'll be darned!" returned Harry Smith, in utter astonishment. "Well, I'll be darned!"

Ardis, who but a moment before had been lost in a golden haze of romance, felt as if the bottom had dropped out of the world. The spell was broken. She not only felt disappointed and defrauded—she was positively angry.

"Well, it's a queer world," she said after a silence. "I thought certainly you were French. I don't think you should have made me think so, if you weren't."

Now it was Harry Smith's turn to be angry. He, too, felt as if he had been cheated out of romance and adventure. This mysterious cosmopolitan creature was just another American girl who said:

"For the love of Mike!"

"Of all unreasonable creatures!" he retorted. "I never made you think I was anything at all. I think, if there's been any pretending, it's been on your part. Nevertheless," he added, for a glance at her lovely profile quickly softened him, "perhaps we might as well be friends, now that we have met. Where are you from?"

"Quincy, Illinois," she replied.

HARRY SMITH leaned back on the rock, facing the gleaming path that led out to the moon, and roared and roared with laughter. Ardis, really furious now, got up, but Harry seized her hand and refused to let her go.

"I'm not laughing at you," he ex-

plained. "But gee, I'm from Quincy, Illinois, too! It's the darnedest funniest thing I ever heard of!"

Once more Harry Smith's gay laughter roared above a roaring sea.

"I don't think it's a bit funny," said Ardis. "What's more, I don't like American men, and I'm going home."

"No, you're not," he told her, still clinging to her hand. "You're going to sit right down here and get acquainted. After traveling all the way from Quincy to Biarritz to find you, I'm not going to let you go now. I'll admit I was disappointed when I found you weren't French; but a French girl might not fit in—in Quincy."

"I wouldn't live in that stupid town for anything in the world," said Ardis. "I'm going back to my aunt."

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it—"

Both of them walked along the beach toward the hotel, but this time neither of them looked at the moon-glinted sea. While they were waiting for a taxi, Harry said:

"At any rate, I'm going to see you again, for I never knew that peaches like you grew in Quincy—or should I say quinces?"

"Typical American humor," said Ardis. "I'm engaged to marry Count Piseto."

"Count Piseto?" He was incredulous. "You're not serious?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

Harry Smith was silent for a long moment.

"Well, if you're really engaged to him, perhaps I have no right to say anything; but I'd get awfully well acquainted with him, first, if I were you. So many of these titled foreigners are just after a girl's money—"

Harry stopped, helplessly, wondering if he had said too much.

"I think it's low and cowardly to knock another man like that," said Ardis. "It's also typically American to be suspicious of all foreigners. You American men have no appreciation of things that really count."

In unreasonable anger, Ardis slammed the door of the taxi in the face of the man to whose kiss she had thrilled only an hour before. Then she burst into tears.

ARDIS, her face freshly powdered, waited in the drawing-room for Aunt Gloria and Count Piseto to return from the Casino. When they came in, the count inquired tenderly about her headache, and told her that it was very touching to find her waiting up for him.

Then Aunt Gloria, with a knowing look, left them. They walked in the garden.

"And what is your answer, my dove?" he asked her.

"I shall feel honored to become your wife," Ardis said.

He took her in his arms and kissed her. Ardis felt that it was more than she could bear, and turned her face away.

"My shy little flower!" he said.

But he insisted on kissing her good night. Ardis closed her eyes, remembered another kiss, and suddenly felt as if she were going to cry again.

She didn't go to sleep until nearly morning, and then she dreamed about a handsome Frenchman who had kissed her by a roaring moonlit sea. In the midst of this dream she was awakened by the angry voices of Aunt Gloria and Uncle William, drifting through the open French windows of the adjoining room.

"I won't!" Uncle William was saying, in his most obstinate voice.

"You're going to ruin that poor little girl's life, Gloria, and all to satisfy your own ambitions."

"I'm doing it for her own happiness, William, and you know it. Moreover, she's in love with the count, and wants to marry him."

"I'd hate to see it. You know his reputation—gambling and women. Of course, as European gentlemen go, he may not be any worse than a lot of them, and if Ardis is really in love with him I'll settle a decent dowry on her; but it seems to me he keeps raising the ante all the time. He knows how ambitious you are to run with that set, and he's trying to get every nickel out of us that he can."

ARDIS clenched her hands in fury. So that was what it all meant! The count wasn't in love with her at all. Aunt Gloria was just buying the title. Well, they should see!

It was a white-faced and angry girl who faced her aunt half an hour later.

"I've changed my mind," she stormed. "I won't marry him."

Aunt Gloria argued and argued, and explained that no European nobleman married a girl without a suitable dowry. It didn't mean, she said, that he didn't love her.

"After all, there are plenty of rich American mothers only too ready to buy Count Piseto's title," Aunt Gloria said. "I'm willing to do as much as if I was your own mother, to see you happily settled in life. You would find Quincy, Illinois, rather dull after all this, you know."

Ardis felt beaten. Now she knew that she would have to go home. Aunt Gloria didn't really care anything about her. All of a sudden she felt utterly friendless and desolate.

She found Uncle William alone on the veranda a little later, and approached him wistfully, feeling desperately in need of comfort and sympathy.

"Oh, Uncle William, let's go somewhere! I want somebody to talk to."

"Bless you," he said, in a way that was much more friendly than she had expected from this usually peppery old gentleman, who had never shown much interest in her before.

They drove along the coast for a time, Ardis finding that she could talk to her uncle much more freely than she had thought. Then Uncle William decided that a little *apéritif* would cheer her up, so they stopped at the terrace.

Suddenly Ardis's heart fairly vaulted at the sight of a sleek, dark head at a near-by table. Its owner was talking to a girl, who was decidedly good-looking and most certainly French.

Uncle William followed his niece's agonized stare.

"Well, I'll be darned if it isn't Harry Smith! Wonder what he's doing in Biarritz! I thought he was in Paris." Then, turning to Ardis, he explained: "Now that's a bright young man, if there ever was one. He has a brilliant future ahead of him, too—the new purchasing agent for the Quincy Machine and Supply Company. I'm a big stockholder in that, and the company had him look me up in Paris. He's investigating a new French combustion system."

"Yes, I've met him," Ardis said.

Uncle William gave her a quizzical look.

"Well, it's a lucky girl who gets that boy. Ought to set your cap for him, Ardis, and leave these wretched counts alone. I'm glad he's here; there's something I've been wanting to talk to him about."

Excusing himself, he went over and spoke to Harry Smith, who jumped to his feet and greeted the old man with great respect. After one casual glance at their table, during which he apparently did not even see Ardis, he kept on talking with Uncle William without so much as glancing in her direction again.

"I don't blame him," she said to herself miserably, trying to hold back the tears. "Of course he thinks I'm a snob, and he's exactly right."

"I asked him to join us, although he seems to be with a lady," said Uncle William, when he came back; "but he didn't seem to want to."

ARDIS and her uncle were sitting on the veranda alone, after dinner. Apparently Count Piseto, Aunt Gloria, and the other guests had dined out. Presently the count's smart little roadster drew up, and he was driving it himself.

"He's come to get you," Uncle William said. "You needn't go, you know, if you don't want to."

"Oh, I might as well," replied Ardis listlessly.

"I wish you wouldn't. I—I, well you see I invited that nice young man over to-night to talk a little business."

Suddenly alive, Ardis sat up and turned a stricken face to her uncle.

"Oh, Uncle William, how could you?" she demanded. "Now he'll think I'm running after him. I couldn't face him. Now I'll have to go with the count."

Ardis got into the roadster. Uncle William took a puff at his cigar, vaguely uneasy. He hadn't liked the tone of Count Piseto's voice, nor the reckless way in which he shifted gears and tore down the shore road in the opposite direction from Biarritz.

Ardis sat silently beside the count. His face looked flushed, and it seemed to her that he was driving a little recklessly. Apparently something had angered him, and she was not going to speak first, she decided.

They drove for what seemed miles. Then, in a deserted spot, he brought the car to a stop. He turned and faced her. There was a queer, angry light in his eyes.

"So this is your American idea of good sportsmanship!" he fairly snarled at her.

"I'm terribly sorry," replied Ardis, guessing that he was speaking of the dowry. "I don't understand about your customs over here. I'm only Uncle William's niece, you know, without any money in my own right."

She might as well get it over, she thought, and break the engagement. She knew now that she never had really liked him. This, obviously, was not what the count had expected.

"That is not what I speak of," he went on. "You have deceived me. You make me to believe that you are an innocent young girl, so I love you. I believe you were to be my wife. I trust you." He was fairly lashing himself to a fury. "And all the time you are keeping rendezvous with a young man!"

"So you have been spying on me?" Ardis asked coldly.

"Ah, no, you have not even the pride to hide yourself! You do it openly, brazenly, and make me the laughing stock before all my friends! You cannot deny it. My friend Countess Sorsky saw you with her own eyes. Is it not so?"

"We are no longer engaged," said Ardis, "so you have no right to question me."

"No, I would not marry you now—

not for all your uncle's money, but you have set my blood on fire, and you shall pay for the insult to my name!"

Ardis tried to struggle from his embrace, but he was like an insane man. He pressed hot kisses on her face and lips. At last she managed to push open the door, and with a desperate effort freed herself and jumped to the roadway; but he caught her wrists, twisting them cruelly, until she cried out with pain.

THE lights of another car flashed into view. The count stepped back, and pretended to be tinkering with the engine.

"Anything wrong?" came a familiar voice, in French.

Ardis's heart gave a mad leap of joy.

As Harry Smith stepped from the car, Count Piseto wheeled. Something in his hand flashed in the moonlight.

"You will please not interfere," he said, leveling the pistol at Harry.

Ardis jumped in front of the man from Quincy, Illinois. Flash! Bang! Now Harry was upon him, and the two men rolled over and over in the road. Then Harry was on top once more. He got up, and calmly put the pistol in his pocket.

"You weren't hurt?" he asked breathlessly of Ardis.

"No, I guess not," she laughed hysterically. "He must have missed me."

Without a word, Ardis climbed into the car beside him; but it was a subdued, silent Ardis. By the edge of the sea he stopped the motor.

"Harry Smith, I'm a snob and a fool. I'm just terrible," she said, with a sob in her voice.

"You're not! You're the loveliest thing I've ever seen, and the bravest. He might have shot you when you jumped in front of me like that. He would have, if he hadn't been so unsteady. Why, you risked your life for me, Ardis, and probably saved mine!"

His arm slipped around her, and once more they kissed to the celestial music of a roaring, moonlit sea.

"I could never love any but an American man," she said.

"And I could never love any but an American girl," said Harry, "and only an American girl from Quincy, Illinois." Once more he threw back his head and laughed. "This whole thing is pretty funny, isn't it, Ardis?"

"Yes, screaming," she agreed. "It's the funniest thing I ever heard of."

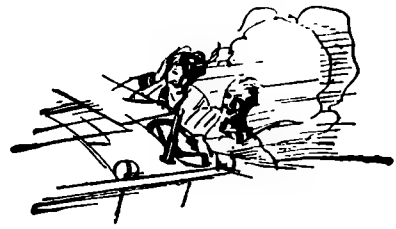
"And really romantic, too," he added. "Imagine us traveling all these miles just so we could find each other a little sooner!"

After a moment he asked her: "But what about Quincy?"

"I love it," Ardis told him softly. "I'm really homesick. It will be fun to get back."

"And I love you," said Harry, in his best French.

"Say it in English," she replied. "It sounds good in French, but it means more in English!"



The thief was still there when Betty returned

Betty's Thief

By Rosalee Tree

Author of "In the Eyes of the World"

THE first excitement of the two cars that had collided directly in front of the large and exclusive millinery establishment of Le Monnier, on the rue Saint-Honoré, had scarcely subsided before shouts sounded from the direction of the Place Vendome.

Betty-Lou Wilson dropped the hat she had picked up and flew to the window.

"Stop thief!"

A crowd streamed by with several bearded *gendarmes* running as fast as their short, uniformed legs could carry them. They went on past the millinery shop, doubled back and came to a halt outside, gesticulating and apparently off the trail.

Betty-Lou, in the year she had been employed by Le Monnier, had grown used to French crowds and puffs of excitement. Paris, keyed to concert pitch always, needed only any unusual incident to arouse its feverish interest.

"The brown hat—from the workroom, chérie," Madame Chatel, the manager, requested. "Be quick. The Duchess is in irritable humor. Our best customer, too."

From the corner of her eye Betty-Lou glimpsed one of the two cars that had figured in the collision being towed away. The crowd that had gone thief chasing dwindled. She shaped a course through the ornate showroom and into the corridor that led to the busy workrooms. As she turned into the corridor, she stopped short.

With parted lips and widening eyes

Betty-Lou stared at the young man who shrank back against the white-washed wall. He was tall, slender and good-looking, but just now his appearance was frightening. Two very dark eyes stared out of a pale, drawn face. His breathing was quick and irregular and his clothing untidy and awry. But Betty-Lou saw that he was an American and that reassured her.

"You had better hide!" she cried, with a quick impulse that was startling to herself. "The *gendarmes* are still outside!"

He nodded, turning to the small door that opened on a side alley. It was the entrance through which he had undoubtedly come.

"But where can I hide?"

His voice, Betty-Lou decided, would be pleasant when it lost its unsteadiness. She hesitated only a minute. Madame Chatel would be seeking her and the Duchess in a temper over the delay.

Betty-Lou whisked open the door that led down into the damp, odoriferous cellar and spoke in a rapid whisper.

"Down there! I will watch and come back when they have gone. Maybe I can get you a coat or something to put on. Understand?"

"Perfectly. I'll wait!"

The door shut behind him and Betty-Lou hurried to the workroom. Why had she done such a crazy, impulsive thing? Was it because he was an American like herself? Was it because he was good-looking—a hunted, harried thing that somehow appealed to the deep tide of her sympathy?

BETTY-LOU shook her bronze head impatiently. No matter. Part of the deed had been done and it behooved her to complete it. Back in the showroom with the ornate brown hat Betty-Lou glanced out. The crowd had gone on about its business. The last *gendarme* gave a twitch to his mustache, shrugged and sauntered off.

Betty-Lou drew a quick little breath of relief.

"Now," she told herself, "for the last act!"

The establishment of Le Monnier was owned by some man Betty-Lou had never seen. His name was Monsieur Maurice Pangon. Leasing the business in its entirety to Madame Chatel, Pangon came to the place at infrequent intervals. The only proof of his existence that Betty-Lou had was the coat and hat that hung in the closet at the end of the hall near the offices upstairs.

She determined to make good use of Monsieur Pangon's apparel.

With the coat draped over one arm and the hat crushed under it, Betty-Lou slipped down the stairs and opened the cellar door. The man was still there. Now he did not look so perturbed and his breathing was even and regular. Color had crept into his lean cheeks and his brown eyes held a reassuring glow.

"All clear?"

"They have gone," Betty-Lou stated, holding the coat for him. It was several sizes too large but better than nothing. It hid his disheveled appearance. "Where are you going? What did you steal?"

He blinked at the two questions, one coming so hard upon the heels of the other.

"Where am I going? I don't know."

"You mean you haven't any home?" Betty-Lou breathed.

He nodded carelessly.

"That is just about what I do mean. What did I steal? Nothing—I wasn't so fortunate."

Betty-Lou looked back over her shoulder. At any moment one of Madame Chatel's assistants might wander out. If it was an offense to harbor a criminal it was an even greater one against the firm of Le Monnier to give the criminal an overcoat and hat belonging to its proprietor! If she were found out!

Betty-Lou's mind worked in split seconds. Impulse raced through her again.

"I know where you can go." She spoke quickly, certainly. "I live in the rue Monsigny, number 37. It is the boarding house of Madame Tassinari. She is a good friend of mine. There are rooms there. Tell her that I sent you and will see her this evening about it."

Two hands found and pressed her own. His eyes seemed to swim like brown stars.

"You're an angel!" he whispered, and disappeared through the doorway that led into the alley. Her last glimpse was of a waving hand.

For a long minute Betty-Lou stood with fluttering heart and round, incredulous eyes. Then slowly she lifted the hands he had held so briefly, spread wide the pink-tipped fingers and looked at them as if she had never seen them before.

"A thief! I must be crazy!" she thought turbulently. "No, he isn't a thief. He didn't steal anything. Why, *I'm* the thief, giving him Monsieur Pangon's hat and coat!"

The day never seemed so long and the work so tedious. Somehow the customers of Le Monnier were entirely out of humor and could not be satisfied. Betty-Lou went briskly about her duties, but her mind was far away. Had the brown-eyed youth gone to the rue Monsigny? Had her landlady taken him in? Would he be there when she returned?

AS it happened, he was there, in a small room on the second floor.

Madame Tassinari, a stout, motherly woman, drew Betty-Lou aside when she pulled the bell-rope and the *concierge* in his hutch at the *pension* opened the door.

"There is a young man. He came about noon. He seemed tired and ill. He told me you sent him. I gave him a room, the chamber of that worthless singer who went to Switzerland. Was that right?"

"Yes, thank you."

Madame Tassinari's small black eyes twinkled.

"Very good. But your young man has no money. I made the usual test. I asked him to change a ten-franc note. When they refuse they are generally penniless. He did."

Squaring her shoulders, Betty-Lou gave the woman a long, eloquent look.

"You don't have to worry about the money, Madame Tassinari. If he does not pay you, I will."

The woman rubbed her hands.

"Ha! Then it is romance that has come to my *pension!*"

And Betty-Lou, turning to the steep stairs, felt her smooth cheeks burn with sudden color.

"How ridiculous!" she thought.

The clever ironing-board and goose-iron of Madame Tassinari had accomplished a miracle. When Betty-Lou went down into the humble little rear dining room, she found the man she had met that morning looking more presentable. His clothing was neatly pressed and he had lost his nervous air of fright. He smiled at her and Betty-Lou smiled back shyly.

They chatted impersonally during

dinner with a carelessness of old friends. Then, when the dessert was served and the very black coffee drunk, he was waiting for her in the tiny front foyer.

"Shall we go for a walk, Betty-Lou?"

She flushed, knowing Madame Tassinari had revealed her identity. She nodded, flew upstairs to jam on her small turban and presently they were sitting together in the small, dusty little park at the end of the Street of the First Shell.

The night life of Paris rolled by in its eternal pursuit of pleasure. West, Montmartre loomed up, fire-crowned. Lights were sparkling like glow-worms in the trees along the Champs-Élysées, but Betty-Lou was only conscious of the youth beside her.

HE began by telling her his name was Alan Porter and that he had been born in Richmond, Virginia. He had come to Paris on a tour, and liked it so much he had decided to remain a year or more. Obtaining employment with a cable company, he had lost his position when the most recent employees were laid off. He had drifted about looking for a new place but had met with no success.

"I have no relatives back in the United States any more," he told her. "No one I could ask for financial help. This morning I was at the end of my rope." His face grew shadowed. "I was passing a jewelry store. I must have been crazy. The temptation was overwhelming. Any one of the trinkets in that window would shelter and feed me until I found a position. They were paving the street across the way. There were loose cobbles lying there. I picked one up and threw it through the window. But I didn't get my trinket—"

Betty-Lou nodded sympathetically. She knew she had not been wrong. Alan Porter was no thief. He was just a nice, attractive boy who had been driven to attempt a criminal feat through the crushing force of circumstances. For some unknown reason Betty-Lou knew the tingle of a deep, secret thrill.

"Now, about the room at the *pension*. I can't stay there, you know."

"I'm staking you," Betty-Lou said in a small, matter-of-fact tone. "Don't you worry. You start out early tomorrow and look for a job. You can pay me back as soon as you're on your feet again. Say," she went on briskly, "don't you suppose I know how it is? I've been up against it here, too. I came over because I was romantic and it seemed such an adventure. I've always been self-supporting, but I had the hardest time getting any kind of decent work. Why, for a whole month, before I started with Le Monnier, I was almost tempted to break a few jewelry store windows myself."

"Poor kid!" Porter said in a low, vibrant voice. "That's agreed, then. I'm to look for work and pay you back with compound interest. Fine. If I could borrow a couple of francs on account we could go up the mountain and have a *bock* apiece. What do you think?"

"I think it's a jolly good idea, as the English tourists say," Betty-Lou murmured. "Let's start!"

Before the week ended Alan Porter had found employment in a garage maintained by a taxicab company. His duties, as he explained to Betty-Lou, were to check the fares on the toll meters of the vehicles and see that they corresponded with the amounts turned in by the drivers. Porter spoke perfect French and Betty-Lou marveled at it.

It had taken her so long to learn to stumble through an ordinary conversation, and here was Porter, able to carry on an animated, spirited discussion with Mme. Tassinari, so rapidly that Betty-Lou was only able to snatch a word or two.

BETTY-LOU discovered that Alan Porter was in love with her. He said nothing, but speech was unnecessary. Love showed like twin lamps in his brown eyes. Love was in the caressing sound of his voice and the touch of his hand. She should, she knew, be overjoyed by the knowledge. Always, she had dreamed of a day when love would come to her.

Before she had left the States for Paris, Betty-Lou had romantically visualized being proposed to by a count or a marquis. She had got over that bravely. Frenchmen did not appeal to her sentimental fancies. She liked the American youths, with their trim leanness and their energy. And now Alan Porter from Richmond, Virginia, was in love with her, and she could find no answer to the problem of it in her heart.

Somehow, Betty-Lou had a premonition of impending disaster. Life was running too smoothly to continue on in the same placid strain.

Porter's knock on the door that Tuesday night roused her from the spell of her dreaming.

"Get your hat and let's go out, Betty-Lou. I was paid to-day and I want to settle my debts. To-night I'm your host."

"Wait downstairs. I'll be along in a minute," she called out.

The mirror was in a kindly mood. It showed her the piquant reflection of a pretty blue-eyed girl with a soft, fair skin and a rose-lipped mouth. Even her plain, simple little dress, with its white collar and cuffs, could not disguise the radiant glamour of her. She pulled on her hat, turned the light out and went downstairs.

Alan Porter took her up Montmartre. It made Betty-Lou think of Coney Island. Music, people, lights and side shows. Barkers shouting through little megaphones and everywhere the vibrant, pulsating clamor of activity.

They looked in on a dance hall where a negro orchestra played American jazz. They viewed a roller-skating rink decked with gay flags, stopped at a cinema palace to view an American movie and then, near the Sacre-Cœur church, looked down on Paris, spread out like a magic carpet, woven with iridescent threads. Above them the bell tower was hung with "La Savoyarde," one of the largest bells in the world. To Betty-Lou the noise and confusion of Montmartre melted into an elfin background for the murmur of Alan Porter's voice.

"I love you, Betty-Lou!" he was saying. "I didn't intend to tell you, but here—to-night—you so close—and the world so far away I had to. I love you. I started loving you that first minute when you took pity on me and hid me in that musty cellar."

Betty-Lou pressed her hand against her heart. It was thudding perilously. She tried to say something, to answer him, but her rose-warm lips seemed unable to speak.

OF a sudden she found herself in his arms, held close and safe. It was his kiss, thrilling and magical, that at last stirred her to realization. Of course she was in love with him! She had fallen in love with him when their eyes had encountered that morning at Le Monnier's. It had

been love that had prompted her to hide him and love that had sent him to Mme. Tassinari's *pension*. And she had doubted it! Had let the premonition of impending disaster stand between them like a wall.

"Betty-Lou, you do care?"

She linked her round, young arms about his shoulders and found words at last:

"So much, Alan!"

But love with its wonder and magic was not destined to linger beyond the very next day. Then Betty-Lou, returning to the millinery shop from her luncheon hour, was summarily drawn aside by Mme. Chatel.

"M. Pangon was here this morning on his monthly visit," madame began. "He went to the closet at the end of the hall. He found that his hat and coat were missing!"

Betty-Lou's heart sank. Pangon's coat and hat! She had meant to return them, but in the press of events she had forgotten.

"Why do you tell me, madame?"

"Why?" The woman's eyes were hard and shrewd behind their narrowed lids. "I will tell you why. Monsieur made a great commotion. So great that Julie, one of the office girls, remembered the hat and coat of monsieur. Julie remembered seeing *you* with the coat over your arm one morning not so long ago. Did you take them?"

"Yes," Betty-Lou admitted faintly.

Mme. Chatel made a wide-armed gesture.

"*Tiens!* So you admit it? We can have no thieves here. You are discharged and you will leave instantly. What salary is due you shall be held to pay in part for monsieur's coat and hat. Congratulate yourself I am not calling the police. If it were not that scandal would hurt our reputation I would do so. Get your things and go!"

That night Betty-Lou hid her troubles and went down to the dining room. The place opposite her at the table was vacant. She decided Alan was working late at the taxicab garage; but there was no sign of him when the meal ended and Mme Tassinari's guests went into the front parlor to play the new phonograph there.

Wearily, Betty-Lou retired. She tried to think of the previous night, high above the city, in Alan's arms and with his kiss hot and wondrous upon the scarlet threshold of her mouth. But it was hard to recapture the awakening of love and those precious minutes when the future had suddenly turned dubious and uncertain. Alan Porter was not making enough to support her. Even if he insisted, she would not marry him and become a burden. And jobs, as she had discovered, were difficult things to find. Particularly when she could offer no references from Le Monnier.

Resolutely Betty-Lou shut her eyes to the hobgoblins in the darkened room and presently fell into a troubled sleep.

USUALLY she and Alan had an early breakfast together. This morning when she went down his place at the table was still vacant. Mme. Tassinari, emerging from the kitchen, hurried to her.

"Your young man. Did you quarrel? I intended telling you last night. M. Porter—he lost his place at the garage and has gone."

Betty-Lou tightened her fingers on the edge of the snowy cloth.

"*Gone?*"

Madame patted her shoulder.

"Yes, gone. And where I do not know. He left no address, no message.

That is why I wondered if you had quarreled. Youth is impatient sometimes. Even romance fades away. I know. I have been married three times."

A wave of bitterness flooded her. Did he really love her as much as he had vowed? Was love so perishable that an unhappy incident could end it? Bravely she shook her head.

No, there was something else. Something of vast importance that had taken him from her without a word of good by. Alan would come back. Her heart told her that she would find him again and that love would know its promise and reward. Through eyes wet with unshed tears, Betty-Lou pushed away the breakfast she could not eat and went up to her room.

The new day was before her. She would start out and find work. There was an agency on the rue Auber. Perhaps they would have something for her. She would pay their fee gladly. She dusted her wan cheeks with powder, stared at herself and tried to force a smile. After that she picked up gloves and bag and went downstairs.

Outside, at the curb, was a vaguely familiar automobile. It was long, low-hung and a rich glossy black. A poised Minerva in silver ornamented its radiator cap.

Betty-Lou half shut her eyes. Where had she seen a car like that before? Recollection flashed across the screen of memory. It had been that morning when she had first met Alan Porter! This car before her was the same make and style of automobile that had been towed away after the collision in front of Le Monnier's.

"Betty-Lou!"

It was Alan's voice and the eerie mystery of it gave her a hollow, dizzy feeling. Then, while she searched the deserted street, the door of the splendid black car opened and he came toward her, a smiling, new Alan.

IT was too much for the overtaxed Betty-Lou. With a little cry she melted into his embrace and dreamily, distantly, felt herself being picked up and carried. When the dancing black specks before her vision had vanished she discovered she was in the tonneau of the car, once more within the cradle of his tender, gentle arms.

"I shouldn't have done it, sweetheart. Forgive me. Tell me—"

Betty-Lou looked up at him.

"I—I don't understand, Alan."

He bent toward her, his cheek against her lustrous, bronze hair.

"That morning. I was in this car when it collided with the taxicab. I was pretty well shaken up. To avoid the crowd I went down the alley and into Le Monnier's by the side door. You saw me and thought I was a thief. If it meant knowing you I was willing to let it go at that. Because, dearest, I had fallen in love at first sight."

Betty-Lou was breathless.

"Then you're—"

"It was not all an untruth. I'm Alan Porter Pangon. I was really born in Richmond, and I'm more American than French. That coat and hat you brought me belonged to my dad. I was to meet him there when the mishap occurred. Betty-Lou, I wanted this to be a surprise. Tell me I'm forgiven."

She smiled up at him slowly.

"You're forgiven. Only," she added softly, with a glance out of the side window, "please tell me where you're taking me."

He leaned and kissed her warm, velvety lips.

"To a place where two people can be married in a hurry!" he answered.

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

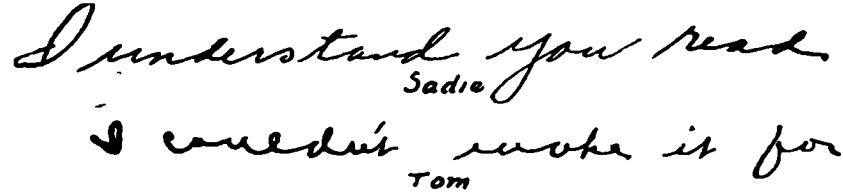
Girls' clubs or organizations in New York or vicinity may secure Mr. Fraser's services for an evening's lecture by addressing him care this magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.

IF there is one thing more than another that surprises me from day to day, it is the number of letters I receive from readers asking for straight character analysis. This means they are anxious to get a better line on themselves. They have, for the time being, stopped worrying about their careers, or about their chances of happiness when married. All they are concerned about is, their shortcomings and how they can be better neighbors or citizens during the year we have just entered.

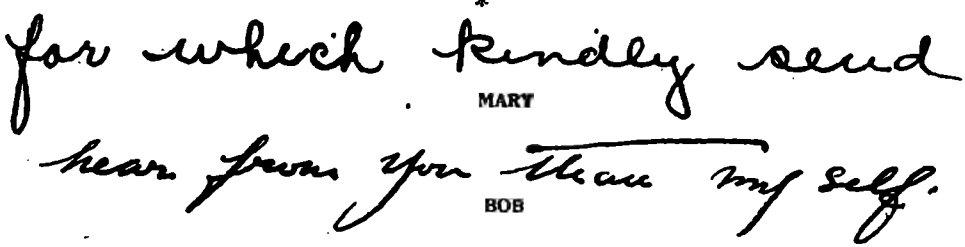
In my opinion this is an encouraging sign, for it shows me those folk really mean to start off the New Year on the right foot. After all, success or hap-

piness is an individual matter. If our natures and dispositions received as much attention every day as some people give their automobiles, there would be little anxiety in our minds as to whether we were to succeed in business or be happy in matrimony. So I recommend straight character analyses to readers who are sincerely trying to be better men and women. Don't forget that self-knowledge is the greatest essential to real success.

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS



(Miss Sadie M., Mobile, Alabama.) Your samples of handwriting are, indeed, a good study in contrasts. You, on the one hand, are a go ahead person, with lots of enthusiasm and sentimentality, while Tom is of the austere type, and doesn't show his emotion or affection as you do. As to whether you two young folk would make a "go" of married life is just what I'm doubtful about. Your two natures in combination would result in a tug of war, the one pulling one way, and the other pulling in the opposite direction. Of course there is nothing impossible about your being really happy and contented with Tom as your husband. It is all a matter of patience and your willingness to close your eyes to his eccentricities. They say it always pays a young couple to have their eyes wide open before marriage, and half shut after the honeymoon. If you are prepared to do that, Sadie, you should get busy with your hope chest. When it comes to your own disposition, I discover a real feminine impulsiveness burning you up all the time. You must be a hard person to live with, and one who is given to moody moments without any justification for getting into that condition. Tom has none of that impulsiveness, but he has got a fierce temper when it is aroused. He also is pessimistic and is inclined to slump when difficulties confront him. Sentimentally, you are poles apart, and for this reason I would hesitate to say that your married life would be a bed of roses.



(Mary L., Pine Bluff, Arkansas.) I see a happy combination of traits in your two natures, a combination which should add considerably to your future happiness as husband and wife. For example, you have a disposition, Mary, which is far from erratic and impulsive. It savors more of the canny

Scotch folk who take things pretty coolly all the time. In other words, you don't enthuse over anything very much. All your thinking is done in an orderly fashion, and when your mind is made up, it is made up for good. You are a big-hearted girl. You like to spend money. You are never happy unless you are giving of your time or your means. I would call you self-sacrificing, and always willing to do your bit. You like company, and get along pretty well with the opposite sex. In this connection, I notice a pronounced streak of romance running through you. I even believe you would be adventurous in love-making; you have, I think, given many a boy, apart from your present sweetheart, a heartache by whispering to him sweet nothings which you did not mean. Bob's penmanship reveals another set of characteristics which are the antithesis of yours. This young man is emotional, and quick in speech and action. In fact he is fiery and high strung. His temper is dangerous when it is let loose. He is a man of force and of great will power. His thinking is swift, while yours is slow. All this leads me to say, with such a mixture of human virtues and foibles, there is no reason why the one nature should not be an asset to the other, and produce a happy union. I wish you both great happiness, Mary.

and tell me what sort of

ANNIE

would write and tell me

HARRY

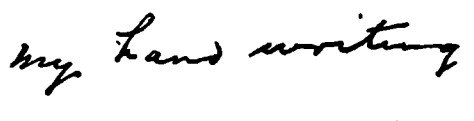
(Annie McC., Pocatello, Idaho.) I am sorry to say I don't agree with you about Harry's apathy and coldness. I have looked in vain to see if there is any evidence of this prevaricating tendency in his nature. You are mistaken in this, and in consequence you are not giving the chap a square deal. I grant you he has a revengeful and vindictive disposition. His temper is quick and his anger stays with him for a length of time. He is a supersensitive boy, and very thin skinned when it comes to criticism. I would say he talks too much for his own good, and perhaps it is here that you have grounds for suspecting his utter truthfulness. If Harry has not enthused over you, and told you in eloquent language how much he cares for you, the reason is not a lack of emotionalism on his part. You're simply not the one who has the power to thrill him to those heights of ecstasy where time is only counted by heart throbs. You may have known each other for years, and have grown accustomed to each other's eccentricities, but nevertheless you and Harry have not much in common. Your mentalities simply don't jibe, and because of this I would hesitate to predict much happiness in your love nest, if by any chance you two got married. When I look into your nature, I find you have all the earmarks of a clean-minded girl. You also are emotional, and give way to temper. Impatience is one of your besetting sins, and superciliousness makes a good second to it. If you are determined to "hang on" to Harry, you will have to shut your eyes to many of his foibles and trust him more. The question is: do you love him enough?

STUDY YOUR OWN HANDWRITING

If the loop of your small "g" or "y" returns without crossing to the right side, like this:

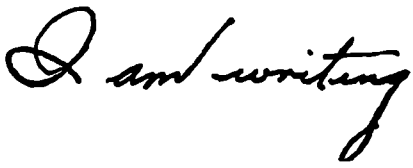
—it indicates you have philanthropic instincts. You are always willing to "do your bit," and ever ready with your sympathy. It also shows that you are eccentric in some things.

Should the loops of your "g's" and "y's" be made with the return stroke curved to the right:



—you are sure to be bubbling over with affection. You love Love, and you love to be loved. You are a kindly sort of person, with pleasing manners, and an engaging personality.

How do you make your terminal—the last letter of the word? If it goes upward, above the word, like this:

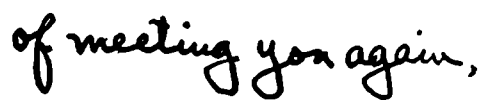


—it discloses a nature interested in everything that appeals to the imagination. Such dispositions are far from being materialistic and worldly. It shows a love for the beautiful in life.

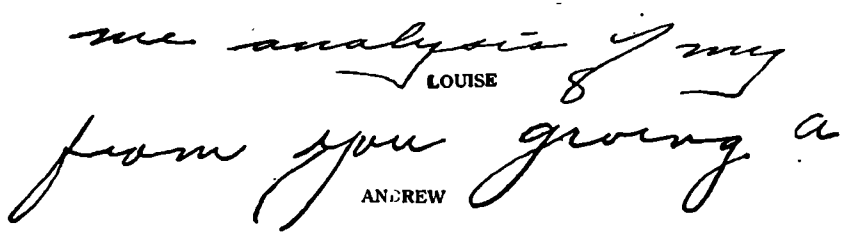
When you separate the small letters in a word by lifting your pen in this manner:

—it signifies that your heart usually controls your actions. You are apt to jump at conclusions, and your judgment of men and things is dictated by a certain inner consciousness, rather than by any straight course of reasoning.

If your lower loops resemble miniature balloons:

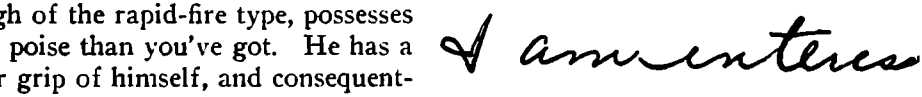


—you are a clever sort of person who can learn things in a jiffy. A person who is lively and vivacious, and whose company is sought after because of their magnetism and individuality. It also indicates self-congratulation, and love of admiration—a certain form of vanity.



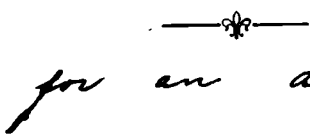
(Louise J., Columbus, Georgia.) You are both sentimentally inclined. You yourself appear to be a very sensitive girl, with quick and impatient mannerisms. Many people would call you an excitable sort of individual. You're forever in a turmoil, and always at the last minute with everything. Andrew, on the other hand, though of the rapid-fire type, possesses more poise than you've got. He has a better grip of himself, and consequently does not show the irritation which lies so near the surface of his nature. He ought to be a blessing in disguise to you, if by any chance you get married to him, since he will be to your nature what the compensation-balance is to a watch. You require steadying before you can hope to become successful either in marriage or in business. Your fiancé is a rather broad-minded sort of chap. Small things don't appeal to him at all. He thinks in thousands, while others around him are thinking in hundreds. Impatience is one of his besetting sins; impulsiveness and a fiery temper run neck to neck for second place. To turn to your chances of happiness when married to Andrew: I see no reason why you two young people should not make a go of it. You are both ambitious, and apparently extremely affectionate. And since you say that "he is all the world to you," I think your ardent belief in him is half the battle. No one will ever find real happiness without having complete confidence in the object of their affection, and the latter is your strongest card. If only you have patience with each other's weaknesses! Remember the old adage, "when courting, keep both eyes wide open, but when married, keep them half shut."

YOUR CAREER

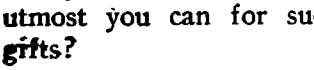


(Miss Olga V. P., Regina, Sask.) Your fluent and regular pen-strokes indicate clearly that you would be a great asset in some architect's office. The whole texture of your writing points to that fact. Your well-separated lines, coupled with the pointed and decreasing letters, show me at once that you have business ability. Your "T" bars are well placed, and your upper loops, which are long, mean that you have that creative power so valuable to any one who has to direct or plan the construction of a building. Looking at your character from another angle, however, I notice one or two things which you would not be any the worse for knowing. For example, you are a very impatient girl. You expect everybody to dance attendance on you. You do things quickly yourself, and think other people should be as smart as you. Then again, you are somewhat matter-of-fact in your way of speaking. I would call you blunt in your speech. You use very little diplomacy at times, and on such occasions more often of-

fend than otherwise. Tact is one trait which is conspicuous by its absence in your nature! A little thought in this direction would do you no harm. And one more weakness I observe is, your willingness to accept whatever comes along. You crawl into your shell like a turtle when it is necessary to "sell" your ability. It seems you simply can't do it. You would do anything but stand up for your rights. This is a great detriment to your success, and I would advise you in future to have a little more resistance when your personal rights are at stake. You have ability and talent, and why not get the utmost you can for such God-given gifts?

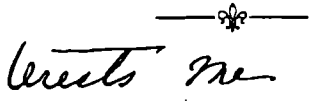


(Miss Annie C., St. Catharines, Ontario.) Your quiet and unassuming nature is not much of an asset to you if your ambition is to be an actress. I have to confess there are tendencies visible in your penmanship which if cultivated might help you to success behind the footlights, but they are only the merest indications and not at all pronounced gifts. If I may be truthful with you, Annie, you would do much better in the commercial field. You are the type of girl who would be invaluable to a busy executive. I see a great amount of method in your mentality. You are very logical, energetic, and conscientious. Your judgment could be relied upon, and your truthfulness is beyond question. Your memory, another very important thing in business, is there at your beck and call. I don't blame you for casting sheep's eyes upon the stage when you have such a penchant for dancing. What girl wouldn't at your age? There is no reason, however, for you to turn your back upon your terpsichorean technique, even though you put in long hours in an office. You never can tell how soon you might have the opportunity of showing your skill in this direction, with the result that you might be invited to perform before some worth-while amateur audience and your talent be really appreciated. I see no harm in your making your dancing an avocation, but in the meantime bend all your efforts toward securing a private secretary's position in some reputable organization.



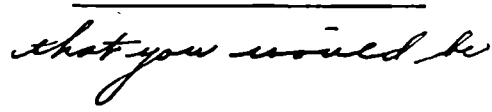
(Evelyn A. P., Chicago Heights, Illinois.) Your flowing pen-strokes reveal to me that you are a go-ahead girl. You lean toward the material things of life, more than to the finer and better influences. Public life appeals more to you than a stenographer's chair. The writing of letters, or the other hundred and one routine jobs that confront a person in an office, simply bore you to death. With such vivacity as you possess, outdoor salesmanship is your forte. By your terminals, I discover you are very matter of fact in your manner of speech. You have opinions of your own, and can express them with a great deal of feminine emphasis. Furthermore, you have a good opinion of yourself and of your capabilities. You seem to have an objective, and you are determined to get there. Some folk would say that you have a gift of the gab. I would myself. Your vocabulary is complete with cute sayings, and you are in your element when you are face

to face with an unwilling buyer. I'm sorry to say that in many ways, Evelyn, you are rather mannish in the way you do and say things. I see here and there a tendency to drop your femininity altogether. I grant you that you have the brain of a man, and also the self-confidence of one who can go out and do your stuff, and come right home "with the bacon" every time. The world might call you a "wow" in the commercial field, and no doubt you are, but as far as what used to be called "womanly instincts" are concerned, your whole nature is lacking in them. I have every confidence that you will do big things in your present job—real estate.



(Miss Vivian W., New York City.) Your handwriting tells me at once that you are heading for success in the literary world. I'm not a bit surprised, Vivian, that you have so many medals and scholarships to your credit. You are a very clever girl, and in the next five years—and you'll only be twenty-five years old then—you may be well established as a writer of fiction. Your thorough education in the arts has given you breadth of vision and fluency of expression. That you are temperamental goes without saying. Your "T" bars also tell a tale of temper which is by no means angelic. Your long terminals whisper to me that you are a very matter of fact young lady. Be that as it may, you have the stuff in you for the making of a writer, and I would not advise you to turn your attention from this one objective. For your own peace of mind, however, let me tell you that you are far too talkative, particularly about yourself. This savors of egotism, and is not at all desirable in a girl of your age. Avoid blowing your own horn; let other people do that. It comes better from them than from you. Try also to live and let live. Your moods must be somewhat trying to the nerves of those you live with. Too much emotionalism in a person is more often a hindrance than a help to one's success in private life. Apart from these feminine foibles, you have much to be thankful for, and ought to do well in the very near future.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS



(Minnie D., Easton, Pennsylvania.) You are more than ordinarily affectionate, and generous. You are, however, inclined to show off quite a lot. You impress me as being a girl with much self-assurance. You require no "crutches" or "pull" to get you to the place you are heading for. You don't need to be chummy with the boss to receive a handsome salary. You can get that on your own merit, and by your own superiority of intellect. You are a good-natured sort of person, and would be approachable at all times. I would say you are extremely candid and gracious in your manner. Your power of imagination is well developed, and is apt to lead you into great flights. For a girl of your age—twenty-one—you are very logical in your thinking. Your deductions are always sound, and your judgment is by no means half-baked. Sentimentally you are full of romance and ardor. You give way readily to sob stories, and are somewhat inclined to be gullible. I'm of the opinion that your memory is not as retentive as it might

be. I would say it was poor, in the general sense of the word. Your haste and attention to a constant list of engagements doubtless encourages this lack of concentration, and leaves you with no time for real thinking. In your excitement to accomplish all you wish to do, you find your days are far too short, and consequently your constructive thought has become spasmodic. In spite of this fact, however, I'm glad to say, your chances of success are a hundred to one.

(Mildred F., Atlantic City, New Jersey.) Your handwriting reveals to me that you are a warm-hearted, affectionate young woman, whose interests just now are inclined to be more physical than mental. I would say, by way of explanation, that you are more concerned at this time with the business of living, and getting the most out of each day, than bothering particularly with the weighty problems of life. You have a distinctive personality, and are essentially "alive." Your vibrant spirit is reflected in everything about you. You are full of energy and activity. Physically, you are on your toes every minute of the day, and mentally you are the same. You are decidedly impulsive, and never fail to act on the spur of the moment, or when the thought strikes you. In typically feminine fashion, you rely on your own intuition to a very great extent, and are given a lot to snap judgments. Your less commendable characteristics are lack of order and care in the handling of your affairs. You are careless with money, although otherwise of a practical nature.

Girls' clubs and organizations in New York and vicinity can secure the services of John Fraser by writing to him care of this magazine. An evening's entertainment and instruction of surpassing interest is provided by Mr. Fraser's analyses.

If you belong to a club suggest to the other members that they set aside a meeting to be addressed by Mr. Fraser. Vocational problems of the members can be solved by having this expert in graphology analyze handwriting specimens. Simply address him care ALL-STORY, 280 Broadway, New York City.

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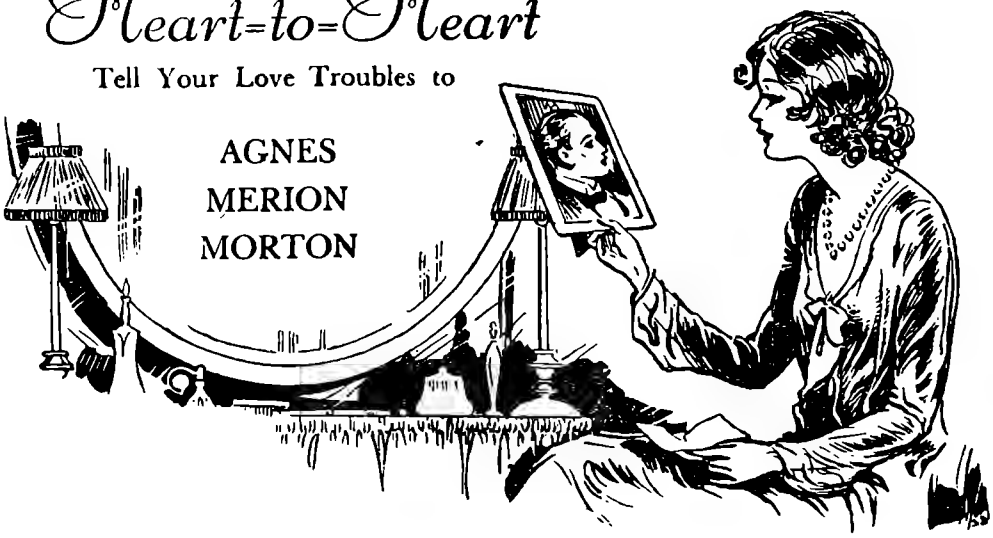
MERION
MORTON



MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Please answer this just as quickly as you can, as I know the crisis in this affair is coming soon and I want to be prepared to face it. I am a young married woman, twenty years of age. My husband is also twenty, and we have been married almost two years. I was the first girl he (we will call him Arthur) ever went with, and we went together for thirteen months before we were married. He has a good job and has always been a wonderful husband.

Three months ago he got a job in another State and I had to stay here at home because my health had become rather poor. While I was here Arthur decided he wanted to have a good time, and he started going with a girl of nineteen. There was really nothing serious about this affair, but since he has come back (his new company transferred him here again) they have corresponded with each other. He was very fair and frank in telling me all about it. Now he tells me that he and Miriam love each other, but he says he also loves me.

Now here is the question. I love him, and also there is to be a baby in April. Shall I give him up to Miriam, who is still in high school, or shall I let him make the sacrifice and stay with me? He is willing to forget, or rather try to forget, her, but have I the right to hold them apart? Please advise me as soon as possible, dear Mrs. Morton.

ALLIE GREEN.

You should not even consider such a thing as "giving him up" to Miriam. In the first place, their "love" can scarcely be anything but the mushroom variety and it will probably die as quickly as it sprang up. It is rather a pity that so young a man as your husband—a mere boy, in fact—should have undertaken the responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood, but after all they are the most sacred obligations in the world. You should not encourage him to think he can lay them aside as

lightly as he entered into them. You need him now for another as well as yourself, and since you are no longer to be separated I believe you can keep him true to you. In later years I hope you may look back on this together as just one of the storms most marriage barks have to weather before they can sail safely into port. Meanwhile, he should cease corresponding with this girl for your sake and his own, and, most of all, perhaps, for hers. Let him give her a chance to forget him instead of teasing her along with letters now and then. She has a right to her own life and he should not try to spoil it when he belongs to some one else.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am just one of many girls who married in their teens without their parents' consent and lived to be sorry for it. I got a man who had no respect for women. He beat me whenever he felt like it, abused me in every way—drank and stole, and finally got caught. He's in State prison now, for eight years, and I'm trying to support my widowed mother and my baby, as well as myself. For the last two years I've worked in a candy store. It's a popular store and makes quite a nice little profit, but the lady who owns it wants to sell it because she is getting old and is not well. She has asked me if I'd like to buy it from her when she gets ready to retire. I understand the business, have done everything around here for months, and believe I could keep it going, but I've no money. We've not been able to save a cent.

Now, there's a man—an older man—who has been coming in once a week to get a box of candy for his wife, and another to send away to his daughter at school. He has always been very respectful to me, nice, just a true friend. Occasionally he has come along just when I was shutting up shop, and walked me home, and we'd get to talking and I'd confide in him pretty nearly everything. Most people here don't know about my husband; they think he deserted me and the kiddie.

When I told him the proprietor is leaving soon, he said: "Why don't you buy her out?" And I said: "I only wish I could." Then he said he could find the money and set me up in the business. A night or two later he spoke of it again, urged me to accept, and said no one would ever need to be the wiser, not even his wife.

Shall I take it, Mrs. Morton? It seems like my big chance. You never get anywhere on a salary and it seems too bad to let such a chance slip when I could get the money so easily. I trust this man, and am sure that what he feels for me is friendship only. He's the only one I know who has ever held out a hand to help me. Wouldn't it be all right?

PUZZLED.

Except for one phrase he used, I might think it would be "all right." Why did he say that his wife need never be "the wiser"? If he is on the level with you he would want her to know all about it, and to be his partner in backing you.

Puzzled, if this business is really as good a one as you think the bank or the "Morris Plan" or some other mortgage concern would be willing to finance it for you. You have the advantage of the right experience to be trustworthy. Why don't you consult one or two of them on a purely business basis? I am sure that your employer, knowing the circumstances, will let you have the shop on easy terms, and that you will be able to borrow for the initial payments. In this way you will be more satisfied, and feel more independent than if you put yourself under a merely personal obligation. If necessary, you might ask your friend to indorse a note for you, but nothing more. Success to you!

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have been wanting to write you for some time and until now I haven't written, so I will start right off with what I would like to get some of your valuable information on, in order that I may not get tiresome. I am a girl of eighteen years of age and am going with a young man of twenty-nine. Although he treats me very nice he doesn't seem to show the right attention to one that is his intended wife. I have been going with him for a year and a half and was to be married on the 10th of November, but since that time we haven't set another date. He doesn't seem to think that I like pleasures as well as he, and when shows come to town I always go with my mother. Of course, I know that I have to make allowances, as he is deputy sheriff and registrar of voters, also he has to look out for his mother's farm, and I know lots of times when I am planning on going somewhere he is called out of town. But I am a girl that likes to be shown that

she is appreciated, as I do everything that I can to please him, and there are so many little things that he could do to show me that he really loves me. He is with me nearly every night of the week, but somehow he doesn't seem to treat me like some of my other friends that are engaged, and that is what I can't understand.

We get along very well, as neither he nor I like to fuss very much, and it seems that whenever we have a falling out I am the cause of it, but he doesn't seem to think that he does anything to displease me. Do you think, Mrs. Morton, that the difference in our ages is what causes this? I have never cared for young silly boys and have always gone with older girls and boys than myself, and I really think the reason that I care for him so much is that he is much older than myself and won't ask me to do anything that isn't right.

Now, Mrs. Morton, I didn't mean to write such a long letter, but it seems as though I could write to you all day. I even forget that there is work waiting for me. The above concern written on this stationery is the firm that I am working for—I have been here as stenographer for two years. Trusting that you will be so kind as to answer this tiresome letter,

BIRDIE K.

Birdie, the letters from my girls are never "tiresome," and the longer they are, as a rule, the better the situation is explained. I think the differences between you and this young man are caused by the difference in your natures, rather than by the fact that he is twenty-nine and you only eighteen. He just doesn't think of your side of the matter, and has never been trained to consider any other angle than his own. Is he fond of your mother, and does he respect her opinion? She might be able, if she is a tactful and understanding woman, to suggest a few ideas to him about the attentions a young girl likes. But you have at least the assurance that he is not "putting on" for you, that he is not pretending anything he does not feel.

There is a trite saying to the effect that "We can't have everything," you know. Like most trite sayings, it is also very true. You will have to make up your mind whether you want him with the traits he has shown, or whether you would rather have a man who would be more thoughtful and attentive, but might lack the sterling qualities this one undoubtedly possesses. After all, he has asked you to marry him. That is the very highest sort of "appreciation."

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Here is a little girl from far away on an island in the Pacific. We have our troubles, just like our white sisters in America, but mine is not a love trouble—yet! What I want to ask you to-night is: "Is a family justified in cutting all family relations with a son or daughter who for some reason marries without telling any one his intentions?" My dear older brother, who was always more a chum to me than a brother, has just done that. He married a girl my father and mother and all the brothers and sisters despise, and he did it without telling one member of his family a word. Why he did it is something we cannot understand, for he did not love her and had no intention of marrying until he had been to the mainland. He used to deny everything when questioned whether he intended to marry her. The news of his marriage came as a blow to us all, and father forbid any of us children to speak to him. He is never to come home to us, and never to be forgiven.

I work in the post office after school, and father says he will not let me keep my job if he learns that I have spoken to my brother. Of course, it hurt me terribly when he did that without telling even me, but when he comes and stands by my window at the post office how can I keep from speaking to him? Every day he comes, and I do not dare even to look at him, but it is too hard to bear. I know he is homesick, dying to hear one word of comfort and forgiveness, and that the hard attitude of my youngest sister, even, who is only eight years old, is driving him out of himself.

Dear Mrs. Morton, do you think my father and mother are doing the right thing, and making us do the right thing? Closing the door on a boy who needs our love as much now as ever, and even more, because he knows his is a life of sadness and unhappy thoughts in the coming years with a girl he would never have married if it had not been for some bad influence we cannot understand? Somehow I can't think it is right. I would rather try to love the girl, too, because I love my brother. I want to be just to him and not too hard, like the others.

Poor John! His feelings must be beyond words, living in the same one-street village with his own blood relations and not a single one of them saying even one word of greeting! What would you do, Mrs. Morton? Would

you kick a boy out, or would you take him under your wing and help him? I think kicking a son out is the worst thing a parent or anybody can do To me, it is the greatest sin. Please tell me, Mrs. Morton, what you think, and perhaps some of the readers would like to do the same. He used to be so jolly, so full of spirits and of love. Now they say he has disgraced us, but even if he has, does that give them the right to drive him from the home where God decided he should stay? Hasn't he as much right to that "home" as any of us, and must I do as father says?

A SISTER TO A PRODIGAL SON.

Dear child, your problem is the very hardest kind to answer. For how can I advise so young a girl to disobey her father? And yet I do feel with all my heart that he is wrong. "What would *I* do?" We can never foresee our own actions in any given circumstances, and yet I believe that if I had a son old enough to "disgrace" himself and me, if he did something weak and foolish or even something wicked, I'd try to stand by him. Because I should be afraid that what he did was caused by some fault in my own training, some lack in me—

But that is hypothetical. To return to your concrete problem, little Hawaiian sister, I think you could at least give him a smile when he comes in for his mail. You might even slip him a note with his other letters. He will understand that you cannot, for the present at any rate, be seen speaking to him or walking with him, and yet a few words or a sweet look from you may go far toward healing the sore place in his heart. And at home you can try, by your own steady and gentle influence, to overcome the bitterness of the others. You may be the means, in time, of restoring this beloved brother to the family he may have wronged, but who are wronging him out of all proportion in return.

Perhaps we may seem already to have given more space to Al Higgins than was his due, but every other letter I open is a comment on his "advice" to Slave-wife, so I cannot feel the subject lacks interest.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Well, I never in all my life wanted anything so badly as to get my hands on a certain Al Higgins, who wrote his opinion of little Slave-wife. There's just one thing wrong with that man. He's living out of his time. He belongs back in the Caveman Age. He raves about a man who knows how to keep a woman in her place, when what he needs is some woman to lead him around by the ear for a while and make him like it. It's no wonder he can't keep a wife. I don't blame his first wife in the least for leaving him, and I'll bet his second was only too glad to get out. And can you beat it? He wants another wife! My, how he likes to show his authority and strength!

Yes, I'm married, and I think I got about the best husband there is. I don't make him help with the dishes every meal, but when I want help I get it, and I don't have to beg and plead to get it, either. If a woman is willing to cook in a hot kitchen all day long to get decent things for her man to eat, it isn't going to kill any man to help clean up the dishes. Frankly, I think it gives each a chance to appreciate the other. But, of course, Al Higgins doesn't think so. He wouldn't! If he were a little more like the young neighbor he speaks about, he might have one wife to-day. I haven't any children yet, but if I ever do and occasion demands getting up at night to tend to baby, you can be sure that hubby will do it, and like it, too.

I don't remember reading Slave-wife's letter, but I got enough out of the answers of the other members to understand the situation and make me feel sorry for her. What she lacks is spunk, and she needs plenty of it with the man she's got. When I saw Al Higgins's letter, maybe you don't think I saw red. I suppose there is going to be a war now. Well, I'm ready, so let it come! He wants another wife so bad, and here's hoping he gets one who will make him toe the mark.

Mrs. Morton, I'd surely love to have Slave-wife write to me, and if she should write, asking for my address, please give it to her. Would like to be her friend.

NEITHER BOSS NOR SLAVE.

I shall be glad to forward any letters that come for you, either from the original Slave-wife or any other woman in her position.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have been a reader of this magazine for a long time, but have never told my troubles, which are many, but I won't speak of my troubles yet. I want to say a few words to

Slave-wife. I think she is very brave to endure all she does. As for Al Higgins, I could just choke him. He is more of a brute than a man. It's no wonder his wife ran away with another man. He probably drove her to it. I just want him to know that the meanest woman is too good for a man of his type. And as for your neighbor, Mr. Higgins, he evidently has more respect and love for his wife than you had for yours.

What if it was your sister instead of Slave-wife? However, I don't suppose you would have any more respect for your sister, according to your letter. As for your getting married again, I wonder if there is a girl in the world that is dumb enough to marry you. I am a young widow, twenty-three years old, and I work, and if all men were your type I would stay a widow for the rest of my life.

Please excuse me, Mrs. Morton, for such bold statements, but when I saw his letter I saw red. I would like to write again and tell my troubles. May I?

A Working Girl.

I am sorry you have any troubles, but I'd be glad to have you write again, either to me alone or to the friendly circle of the department. Maybe we can help, and you can be sure that we'll sympathize, anyway.

Dear Mrs. Morton:

In your November number of "Heart-to-Heart" column I note letter written by Al Higgins, where he asks you to find him a lady who will be a true helpmeet to a man. Say, if that fellow calls himself a man, I would like to be with him for a little while and convince him that he has the wrong opinion. He had better look up in the dictionary and find out what the definition of a man is. What he wants for a wife is a mule. I see his first wife was no fool, and the second one showed very good judgment when she took his advice and got out. She was lucky at that. I never did read such a pig-headed letter in my life, and never did think that there were in this country, the United States of America, such beings as that living on this side of the pond. I should have said human beings, but we cannot call an animal human. No wonder women take a hammer once in awhile and get the likes of him out of their misery. There should be a bounty on the scalps of the likes of him, paid by the State.

I am a married man, have been married twenty-two years, and to-day I love my wife more than ever. I would go to h—l or any place for her at any time. The most wonderful little woman in the world, and I think all women are the same, provided the pig-heads will treat them as they should be. Sure, I'll sweep the floor, attend to the kids, wash the clothes or cook for her. Why not? She does the same for me. And as for your type that think it is beneath you to do that, my advice is do not marry. Let the girl have her freedom—she will be better off. Your letter, Mr. Al Higgins, sounds very much as if a pinhead wrote it. You must wear a size-four hat. You are the type of man that imposes on women. My advice to all girls is, do not marry any man that tries to dictate to you before marriage. If you do, God help you. Better not marry at all. Al, your mother was a woman. Don't forget her. Have you thought of her lately? I say, God bless all women—how could we get along without them? And yet I call myself

A Real He-Man.

I call you one, too, and am glad to print your letter to show Mr. Higgins that all the people who disagree with him are not women.

Dear Mrs. Morton:

I read Slave-wife's letter and a good many replies. Irate Irene and I would make a pretty good couple for Slave-wife's husband to have around. What I wouldn't do to that man is no one's business! Another man I'd like to talk to is our "dear" Al Higgins. I read his letter and, Mrs. Morton, has anything ever made you so mad you see red? That is the way his letter struck me. The man, he says, is a born fool because he helps his wife with the baby and housework. He has his wife, hasn't he, and I'll bet a dollar they're happy.

I am only nineteen years old and the mother of two babies, but believe me, when Friend Husband had the idea he was the boss in our household and I was slave, things happened. I can talk faster than he can, and longer. Let me tell you, he called for peace and told me how sorry he was, too. Now we go out together sometimes and sometimes we go alone, but when we go out we never lie about where we go nor whom we go with. I am here to tell you no man like Al Higgins deserves a wife, nor do I blame his first for going with another man. He probably was human.

Young Stepping Mother.

That letter evidently made a good many people "see red." The phrase occurred again and again in the answers, as you may see by reading these samples. On the other hand, some people seemed to be more amused than angered.

Dear Mrs. Morton:

The letter from Al Higgins sure gave me a laugh, and a good hard one. I know he will have a hard time finding himself a wife. If he tells her his views on women and wives, she'd be a nut to marry him—what say? We

aren't the weaker sex any more. We aren't so timid as we used to be, and we're more businesslike and don't have to marry to have a home. We can make one for ourselves, Al. You're one reason I'm gonna be

AN OLD MAID.

Mr. Higgins, if you want to read any more of your mail, please call with a truck.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Can you tell a poor soul how to become popular? I work in a tin mill and there are just oodles of girls, but they don't care a hang for me. I'd like to gain their friendship, but I know they're not interested in me. Like other girls, they take to each other like fire; but me, oh, gosh! they leave perfectly alone. What would you advise me to say to them? I never have anything to say to them, I don't know why, but I just can't start anything to save my soul.

It's the same way with boys. I'd like to know them, but to them I am only a boring person. They like other girls immensely, but I can never say anything to make them interested in me. Oh, if I could only be popular. My soul just craves popularity and friends, but I can't have them. So do you think you can help me?

UNPOPULAR.

I'm not going to address you by the name you signed; I don't want you to associate that word with yourself any more, even in your thoughts. For, just so long as you think yourself "unpopular," just so long you will be.

To begin with, I think you are too self-conscious. You dwell too much on what people are thinking of you, on the effect you are producing on others. You tell yourself, "They won't like me," and so, of course, they don't—or don't seem to. For you are just as likable as any one else is, and they'll find it out if you give yourself a chance. Keep your body sweet and clean. Take a bath every day and keep your hair and teeth and fingernails in perfect condition. Dress just as neatly and prettily as is consistent with your means and the conditions under which you work. Make your appearance just as attractive as you possibly can, and then forget yourself.

Think about other people. Think nice things about them. And then tell them so. If the girl next to you has a pretty new dress, or a string of beads, or a ring, and you admire it, tell her so. Only be sincere. Don't say a thing just because it would be a nice thing to say, but because you mean it.

Get things to talk about. Join a dancing class; go to evening school; go to Y. W. C. A. gym. You will meet new people who are doing the same thing, and you will have a new point of contact. When you are in a crowd look around and you will see others who aren't having any fun—perhaps they have told themselves they are unpopular, too. Go up to them and start something. They will be some one to practice on, anyway, and they will appreciate the attention. To be interesting you must be interested. Read the papers enough to have an intelligent opinion on what is going on in the world, and to be able to ask intelligent questions about sports, or the latest flying stunt, or some topic of merely local interest. When the chance comes up, ask a boy or young man some of those questions. They just love to explain things!

But the question of attracting the sterner sex is too complicated to treat as briefly and casually as I would have to treat it here and now. We must leave it for some other time. Only make sure of your girl friends first. No man admires a girl who is interested only in men. Make a friend at every opportunity—among older women and younger children, everywhere. You can do it just by forgetting yourself and thinking of the other persons. Be honestly, genuinely interested in them and they will reciprocate by being interested in you.

Beauty For You

By FERN CHANDLER

BEAUTY results from attention to the little things. Follow faithfully the beauty hints given in this department and you will be delighted with the results.

If there is any question about your personal appearance that you would like to ask Miss Chandler, address her care ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City.*

Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with each question.

BEAUTY! Charm! Attractive personality! What girl does not want to possess these alluring characteristics?

Naturally, we all do. Some of us are "wall flowers" because we imagine beauty must be born to us, that its cultivation is expensive, requires untold time, and consequently is a luxury.

The cultivation of beauty is *necessity*, not luxury.

Costly, only if you make it so. Of course, if you can afford it, you may spend hundreds or thousands of dollars a year on cosmetics, and attendance at the beauty salons both here and in Europe. But talking about just folks, like us—you need but a few minutes a day to make most effective beauty aids yourself out of the simplest condiments at little expense.

I have the highest regard for manufacturers of all sorts of cosmetics, as long as they are pure. However, I am not here to tell you about bottles, jars and boxes all dressed up in attractive wrappings, but to explain the use of ordinary things that are fun to make and effective to use.

Do you know that such inexpensive and homely-sounding things as raw beef, lettuce, lamb suet, eggs, salt and lemons are beauty aids?

One of our readers who hails from Brooklyn and signs herself "M. H." asks: "What can I do about my hands? They are always rough and red-looking — particularly in cold weather."

I want to answer "M. H." right here, for her complaint is prevalent this time of year.

First a little scolding. My dear, why can't you remember that a little precaution saves a lot of curing? As long as you go outdoors without gloves, put your hands first in hot then cold water, or don't dry your hands

properly, they will be rough and red-looking. Chapped skin is the bugaboo of cold weather.

Keep a bottle of pure glycerine handy and whenever you wet your hands apply a liberal coating of glycerine, allowing it to soak into the skin as long as possible. If you are in a hurry to go out, or wish to use your hands and the sticky glycerine interferes, do not try to wipe it off, but rinse your hands in clear tepid water, then dry them thoroughly. You will be delighted at the smooth texture it gives to your skin no matter how rough it has been previously.

However, once you have got your hands chapped, glycerine alone will not bring back their natural smoothness. Try a liberal application of any good cold cream, allowing it to remain on over night. To prevent smearing the grease all over the sheets and your pet nightie, buy a pair of cheap gloves—cotton ones are best—or perhaps you have a pair of old ones. Put them on over the coating of cream.

Whenever I suggest the use of "any good cold cream," I get showered with queries like this: "What is a good cold cream?" "Is so-and-so's better than whosis?" and so forth.

They are all good if they agree with your skin and are pure.

In this special case I would suggest using any kind of camphor ice, or my pet chapped-skin healer "Mutton Tallow cream," which you can easily make yourself.

When you know, as I do, that one of the best skin foods is made from lamb's wool oil—as being the nearest thing known to the oil of the human skin—you will see why I advocate lamb fat or tallow for smoothing and soothing the hands, face, neck and feet. Get a piece of lamb fat from any butcher, place a piece about the size of an egg in a pan and let it melt over a very, very slow fire, so it will not burn or discolor. After it is melted strain it.

Tallow cools very quickly, so work fast and use an egg beater to mix in the other ingredients. Add drop by drop two scant teaspoonfuls of glycerine, and about ten drops of benzoin. Keep beating the tallow as you add these. If the odor is offensive to you, add some fragrant talc powder. A few drops of perfume may be used instead, but you'll have to trust to luck that it will mix through the tallow thoroughly. Place this in jars and allow to cool and harden.

If you have any difficulty in making the cream, write me, inclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and I will be only too happy to forward any additional information.

A word about the general care of the skin during this trying season. Wind and cold can do just as much harm to sensitive skin as sun.

In winter and early spring, when the air is cold and the wind strong, your skin needs additional care. Morning and night it is necessary to use cream on the parts exposed to the weather, and if you are planning to spend a good deal of time out of doors, a light coating of vanishing cream should be applied first. If you do not like vanishing creams, then cold cream your face well, allowing the cream to remain on a few minutes before you wipe off the surplus. Powder, and you have a protective coating against the weather.

I am sure each one of you has some question you would like to ask—some little advice you would like about your hair, or skin. I am here to answer your questions, to give you advice, to help you in any way I can to make

yourselves more attractive—to enhance each and every one of your good features—to correct any errors you may have made in your effort to attain and keep that elusive though vitally important thing called beauty.

DEAR MISS CHANDLER:

Kindly tell me, at your earliest convenience, a remedy or aid for shaggy eyelashes, also stubborn blackheads. Thanking you,

(MISS) A. BURNHAM,
Brooklyn.

Shaggy eyelashes will appreciate a liberal and regular night and morning massage of olive oil. If you wish black heavy lashes, would suggest you make a strong solution of black tea and apply it by closing the eyes and sponging the lashes at intervals. More often the better. In the next issue of ALL-STORY you will find the answer to those stubborn blackheads.

DEAR MISS CHANDLER:

I wonder if you can tell me anything about muscle oils, their ingredients, *et cetera*? Also can you tell me if massaging is necessary for a clear skin? I shall be very grateful for answers to these questions.

ETHEL GRANT,
Los Angeles, Cal.

How nice to hear from such a distant reader. Muscle oils are many and have varied uses—I know what they are supposed to do, but cannot recall any instance where I've seen miracles. Perhaps I'm not authoritative as I do not know them all, but at least they cannot harm you even if they do not live up to their promises. Without their alluring perfume, the majority would smell amazingly like a mixture of castor and olive oils. I intend to discuss at length the care of the skin in the next issue of ALL-STORY and will no doubt answer your question in detail.

Let us hear from you soon again; it makes us feel neighborly with all the world to hear from such a distant friend.

Are You Lonely?

If you are, just write to Mrs. Dorothea Dale, care of ALL-STORY MAGAZINE, 280 Broadway, New York City, describing yourself and the kind of pen pal you want. She will publish your letter and other lonely readers will send you prompt, interesting, comradely replies.

Girls may write to girls, and boys to boys. Your full name will not be printed, so don't let shyness hold you back.

Let the Postman Bring You Friends

Send in your letter to-day—everybody, so that you can watch for it in an early issue of this magazine.

ALL-STORY'S HALL OF FAME

Doris Knight Jessee

DORIS KNIGHT JESSEE has already won the hearts of ALL-STORY readers with "Love in Peril," the "Palace of Love," and "Sleuthing for Cupid," and now offers them another charming romance in this issue.

She doesn't look as if it were almost fifteen whole years ago that she first burst into print!

Vivacious brown eyes, curly chestnut hair, a bewitching smile, and an adorably slender figure just made for chic pretty clothes—why, she seems hardly more than a girl herself. And just the sort of girl who might be the heroine in one of her own stories.

No, you would never in all the world surmise that Doris Knight Jessee made her début as an author such a long time ago. But this is only because—yes, now the secret is out—Doris Knight Jessee was barely twelve years old when she sold the first successful fruits of her literary aspirations to a Sunday School magazine. And she was still wearing pigtails and playing with dolls when she got honorable mention in *St. Nicholas.*

It was long before that—when she was only seven—that she decided that she would be a great writer, and laboriously printed her first story in scraggly letters on a big sheet of blank school paper.

"I must have had my nerve then," says Doris now.

But it's nerve that makes for adventuring. No doubt it was the same dauntless spirit that fired the child author's ambitions that later led her to explore some of the most interesting spots on this and other continents.

"I've been across the continent six times," says Doris Knight Jessee, "and I've taken all the routes there are. I love Montreal with its myriad church bells, and historic Quebec and Victoria with its gardens.

"And the Southern countries—ah, those are the places for me! Mexico, with its dark-eyed beauties. Guatemala City, perched high on a mountain. Nicaragua, with its parrots. Panama with its colorful shawls and cheap French perfumes. Porto Rico, romantic and beautiful. Trinidad—the loveliest island I know. Venezuela— Oh,

I could go on indefinitely. I'm wild about seeing strange places and having adventures; and after I come back, I try to put some of my joy in travel into a story so that my readers can share the thrill."

It's a great thrill to Doris to receive letters from readers who have enjoyed her stories. So write her if you care to. Address your letter in care of ALL-STORY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

In the next issue there'll be a picture of Peggy Gaddis. She's the author of "Fighting for Love," and many other lovely stories.

Please Write to Us!

Every day when the mail-man comes around, we look eagerly for personal correspondence from our readers. The happiest moments of our busy day are those in which we receive letters from friends we have never seen—girls who write what they really think of ALL-STORY magazine.

If you're too busy to write a letter, just fill out this coupon and mail it. *Thank you!*

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Cinderella on Broadway .....

Mystery Girl .....

Everything but Love.....

Her Marriage Vows .....

Forced to Love .....

Something to Live For.....

The Stronger Current .....

"Chêrie, Je T'Aime" .....

Betty's Thief .....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)

In Confidence

Practical First Aid to Everyday Living

Conducted by

DOROTHEA DALE

ANY question about the little problems that confront you daily in your business or social life Mrs. Dale will be glad to answer. No question is too small. Write her about anything that is perplexing you—how to word a letter, how to travel, what present to give, what to say and when, table etiquette, et cetera.

If an emergency arises and you need immediate advice your letter will be answered by return mail, if you will inclose a return envelope stamped and addressed.

All letters will be held in strict confidence.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

Eight of us girls have a bridge club, and it's my turn to have them next. I wonder if you could give me some new ideas for prizes. I'm so tired of giving handkerchiefs and letter paper, yet there seem to be very few other things that would suit everybody.

LALLA R.

It seems to me that any gift shop is full of suggestions, and in this after-Christmas season you can do much better than you could a few weeks ago. Select things you yourself would like to win, and you can't go wrong. A tiny cloisonné compact; a cigarette box in hammered brass—even if the girls don't smoke, such things are nice to have for guests—a shade for a bed lamp; a pair of candlesticks or sconces; small manicure sets for use while traveling; a book cover with marker to match—oh, the ideas are endless. A pretty prize at a party I recently attended consisted of nothing but a large napkin of heavy paper, colored silver and lavender, the four corners brought together and tied with a huge lavender bow. It formed a bag which was full of small balls of cotton, each one tied with baby ribbon of a darker violet to make a small powder puff. A lovely thing to have on one's vanity table beside a big box of powder, for the girls' dressing room at a dance. Bridge tallies and score pads, with two packs of cards; book ends; a clothes brush in a pretty case; a miniature "handy" sewing set; a novel ornament for a gown or hat—any one of these things would be both attractive and useful. Since you live in a city, there must be plenty of gift and novelty "shoppes" accessible to you. And for any one who can't get to the stores easily, there are always the mail-order catalogues.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I have a very delicate stomach and am fre-

quently distressed when dining with friends, because they serve food I cannot eat. Can you tell me the most graceful way to refuse things that don't agree with me?

DIETING.

The most graceful thing to do is to make no remark when a thing is passed to you, but to take a small portion on your plate and pretend to eat it. This is done quite easily when the offending article is part of a course; when it is the entire course in itself you may still be able to play with it with your fork and call no attention to the fact that you are not enjoying it. Digestion or indigestion is not a pleasant subject for a dinner table. Let me tell you something I overheard when I was a child; it made a very strong impression on me. There was in our town a beautiful and popular woman, who was so ill that her doctors did not allow her to eat anything, even bread crusts, after one or two o'clock in the afternoon. Yet she was hostess at the most important functions, and was invited everywhere. Once a gentleman, who had been her dinner partner the evening before, was calling at our house, and some one remarked: "Mrs. Harwood never eats at night." He exclaimed: "What!" and "Are you sure?" and "Well, I never noticed it." She had been so vivacious, so entertaining, that he not only did not remark that she was leaving her plates untouched, but he would hardly believe it when told. It is not given to all of us to be at once as witty and as tactful as that; but we can all refrain from calling attention to our disabilities and making our hostess and others uncomfortable.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

Is it all right for a man to smoke when he is walking with a lady?

B. M.

Not if they are walking on a city street. Along a country road he may, if he has asked her permission first.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I picked up a copy of ALL-STORY in a street car, just for curiosity, and think it's fine. I found your column and have decided to put my problem before you. My fiancé and I have known each other from childhood, and before I left school we were engaged. He never went any further, but I have been away to college for two years and now I notice how lacking he is in polished manners. He tries hard to do right, but is backward in a crowd.

Now I put my problem: should I marry him in spite of these social blunders of his? I love him, but can't help noticing them, somehow. Do you think my love will be grounds enough to make our married life happy? Could he make me forget the endless mistakes he will make through life? Please excuse this long letter, but it is too deep for me, and I haven't any one I'd like to discuss Bob with. Thanking you very much, I am one of the many whom you help.

"RED."

Why do you feel that his mistakes throughout life will be "endless"? So long as he has the desire to improve himself there is every chance that he will do so. Not every one has had the advantage of a cultured home and parents who instilled good manners from babyhood. Occasionally one meets men who seem to pride themselves on being ill-bred, who sneer at correct English and polished manners. Such men are hopeless; they are too ignorant to learn. Your Bob is not like that. You say he "tries," and that is what counts. You can help him, not by constant fault-finding, but by gentle and persistent guidance. There is one book, "The Gracious Hostess," by Della Thompson Lutes, which may help you. Read it through yourself first and note the parts you'd like him to know; then read those parts with him. The chapter on "The Business Man" is particularly illuminating. When he has mastered the rules all he will have to do is put them into practice, and they will soon become second nature to him.